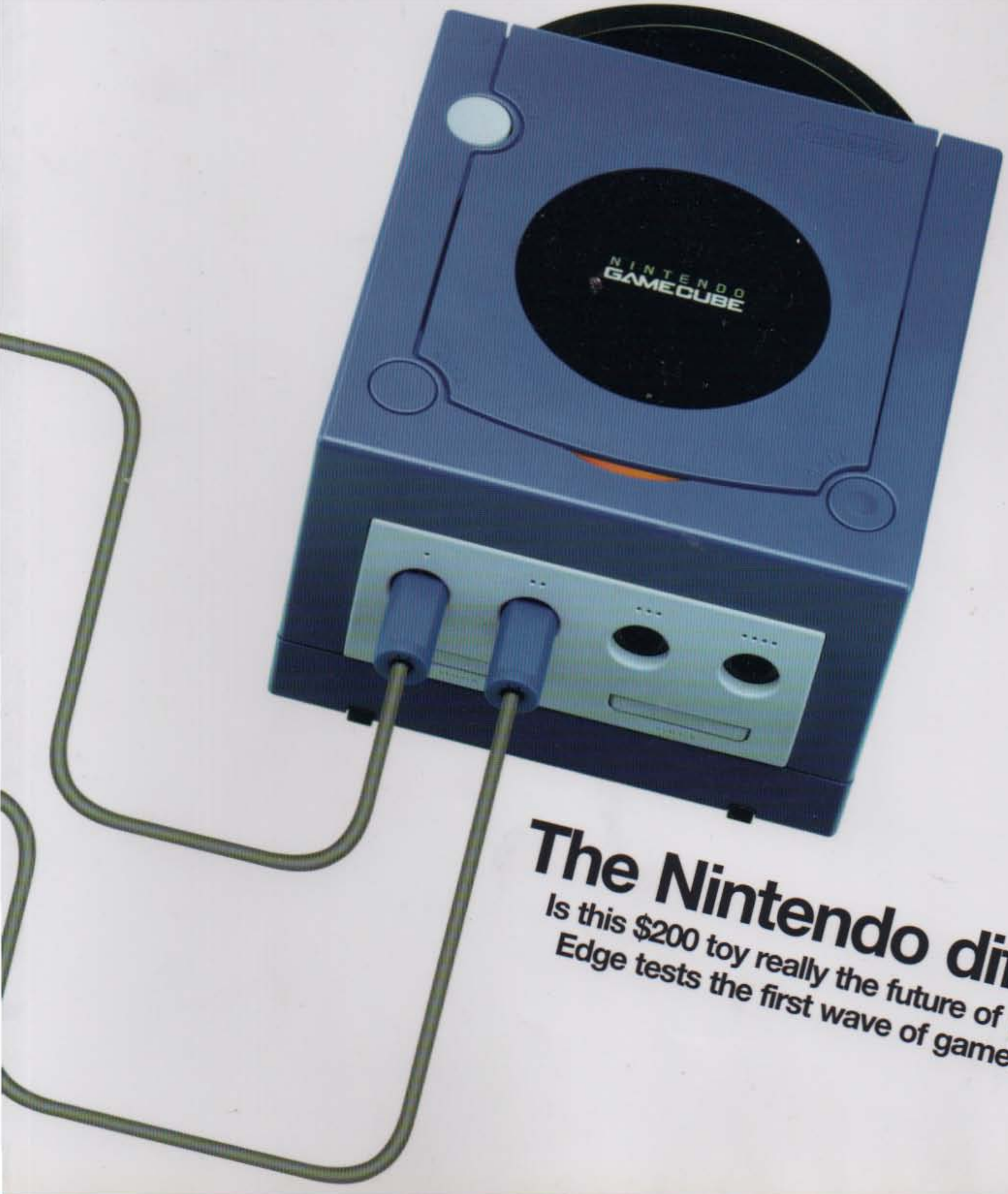
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Previewed: Unreal 2,
Luigi's Mansion, Pikmi
WaveRace: Blue Stor
Reviewed: Crazy Ta
Gran Turismo 3: A-s
Operation Flashpoin



The Nintendo differenc

Is this $200 toy really the future of videogaming?
Edge tests the first wave of games to find out

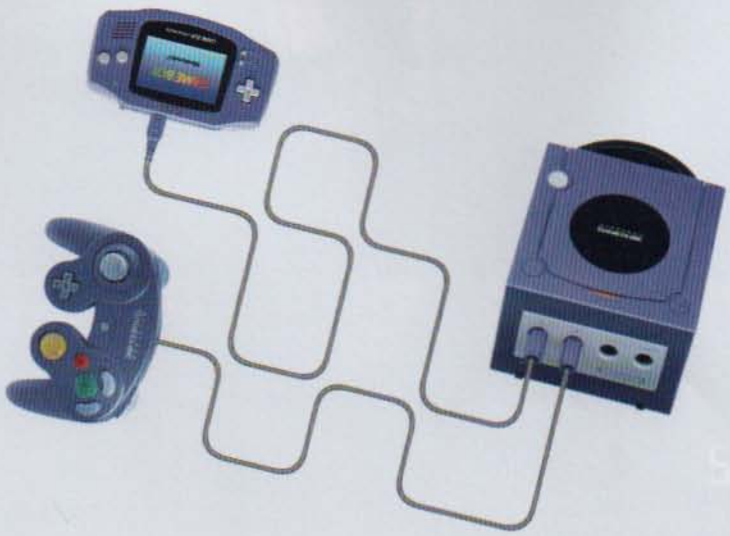




The E3 storm has long since passed, but the resonance of the event lingers in the memory, chiefly because it painted such a vivid portrait of the videogame industry as it moves into a new age. It was visible on the faces of the corporate suits wheeled out like so many mannequins to elaborately espouse the virtues of their own particular brand of e-entertainment, behind the cheese that accompanies events such as E3 by default. Even Shigeru Miyamoto, once among the most modest players within an industry increasingly built on hype, was sucked up into the whirl, taking to the stage at Nintendo's pre-E3 conference like Japan's answer to Rocky Balboa, his arms aloft, holding a GameCube unit in one hand and a controller in the other.

But he had good reason to look triumphant – even before the E3 event itself had begun. With the videogaming landscape having looked so bleak for too long, a sense of palpable expectation lingered in the air, each conference attendee waiting to see where the industry's most stalwart – and routinely profitable, even in 'lean' times – player intended to take them. The destination looked compelling, if not wholly convincing. But, as the company's new mission statement goes, 'the Nintendo difference' was enough for **Edge** to place GameCube on this month's cover. This month's E3 special (see p54) should give reason for even the most battered industry veteran to be optimistic, too.

The showings of Microsoft and Sony provided stimulating viewing, too, as did the wares of Sega as it matures into a serious thirdparty developer (indeed, the latter provided some of E3's highlights on every platform). Of less interest as a gaming format, however, was the PC. Having taken a back seat in many developers' minds because of the existence of XBox (whether they're shovelling across code once intended for PC audiences or hastily assembling titles to ride on the back of Microsoft's $500m push), the monolithic computer struggled to make a fist of its validity as an entertainment system. Away from E3, however, **Edge** looked at *Unreal 2* (p38), which should assuage many fears.



Features











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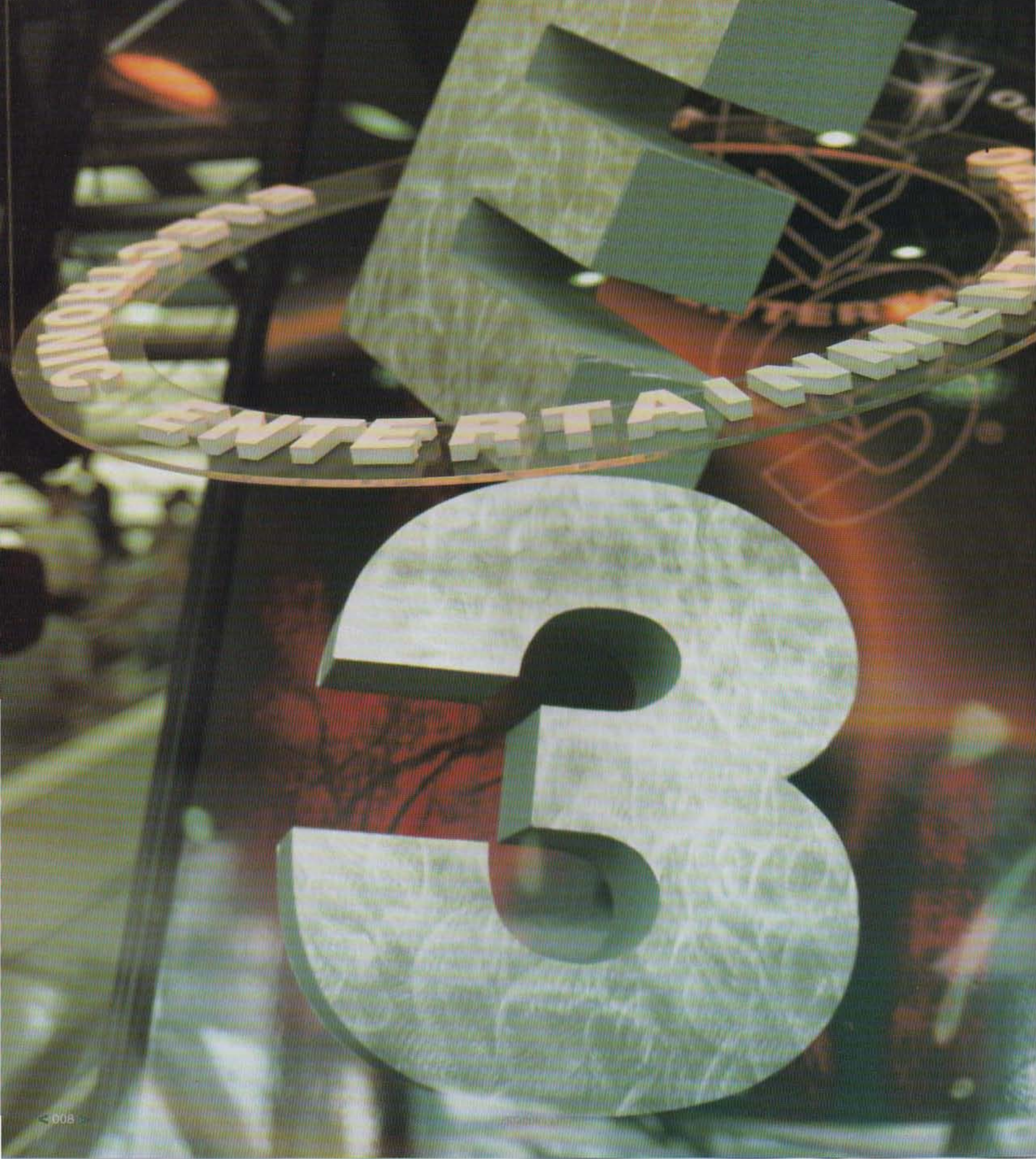
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Print
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Software: *QuarkXPress*, *Adobe Photoshop*, *Macromedia FreeHand*, and *Nisus Writer* **Typography:** (Adobe®) Helvetica [illegible], Thin, Light, Roman, **Medium**, **Bold**

"What are you laughing at? Hah? You bald piece of shit. You fat little whore!"

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



Threeway E3 showdown offers no true victor

But game industry's annual event does present new avenues for Sony's platform while introducing Nintendo's, and giving Microsoft the opportunity to learn all about the difficulties of launching a console platform – the hard way

The most significant in its seven years of existence, 2001's E3, from May 17-19 at the LA Convention Centre, saw Nintendo show its 128bit hand, Sony consolidate its position as preferred platform provider, and Microsoft stumble its way fully into the videogame industry's conscience.

Three major issues will colour the next three days, namely Nintendo's decision to launch GameCube at $199 on November 5 in the US (three days prior to XBox); Sony's apparent willingness to turn PS2 into some form of PC via email and other comms initiatives; and Microsoft's inability to deliver finished XBox dev kits, leaving many developers showing half-baked wares.

But the action actually kicked off a day before the show doors opened, with each player staging pre-conference presentations. **Edge** attended every one.

7:40am, May 16, LA Ent'ment Centre, Downtown LA

Edge arrives early and is ushered into a breakfast area, and with pleasantries and business cards exchanged with other members of the global games press, it's time to queue for Microsoft's big pre-E3 event. Security is overly pedantic, Tecmo's representatives jump the queue, and the doors duly open.

Although held in same place as Sega's event last year (and just metres from the SCEA pre-E3 conference set-up), the interior has been completely covered in black material, and green spotlights complete the XBox-like trademark look. Seats arranged in neat rows are swiftly taken and, as ever with these types of events, oversubscription slightly delays proceedings as latecomers are directed around the room looking for a potential seating spot. Many don't find one and end up awkwardly standing at the back. An organiser shouts out instructions against flash photography which, of course, will be subsequently ignored by those present.

Up on stage is a monolithic XBox structure, which many erroneously assume is a speaker stand. After a little delayed start, Lorne Lanning from Oddworld Inhabitants enters in usual inimitable Texan style to subdued hollering from crowd (blame the time of day), and sits confidently stagefront on stool provided. Predictable (and now familiar) explanation of the reason behind Oddworld's shift to Microsoft's 128bit powerhouse follows, before Lanning gets on with demoing the impressive *Munch's Oddysee*, much to the entertainment of the assembled masses.

Robbie Bach, chief XBox officer, walks on stage to officially kick off proceedings. With remarkable brevity, and displaying the efficiency of a Swiss banking clerk, he lowers the top of the monolith to reveal an XBox unit balanced imposingly on top. Then begin the video link glitches that will plague the rest of the presentation. The crowd is promised the boot-up sequence, but with the projection screen unwilling to display such a thing Bach soon moves on to announce US release details – November 8, $299, with 600-800,000 units in shops from day one. The announcement is swiftly followed by a showing of the actual game packaging, in expected XBox-green DVD casing. Bach says he's 'super excited', a term he will use again. And again.

Three major issues colour the next three days: Nintendo's decision to launch GameCube at $199, Sony's willingness to turn PS2 into a PC, and Microsoft failing to deliver finished dev kits

Bungie's *Halo* product manager, Joe Staten, follows and showcases XBox's other potential killer app. Unoptimised frame rate glitches aside (which **Edge** is later informed is due to an autosave feature not fully implemented), this retains massive potential. Time restraints cut short an immersive-looking demo, even if Staten's foolish fireless attack on a gun-toting Covenant alien sees him quickly killed. At least the crowd gets to see the intelligent autosave feature in action.

Bach steps back in to tell the crowd how excited he is about *Halo* and to introduce Glenn Schofield from Crystal Dynamics, who turns up with the colourful and quite pretty *Mad Dash Racing* – a multiple-route, seemingly glorified version of *Pen Pen Triathlon*, and one of the few XBox demos apparently unaffected by notable framerate issues. Again, time restricts the demo, but, as with most of the titles shown here, **Edge** will meet up with the game again during the show itself.

Bach returns to the stage to talk about EA's involvement with XBox, before inviting Westwood Studios' Louis Castle to join him. First, obligatory MTV-on-speed-style edited video is played showcasing typical franchises such as *Madden* and F1 XBox versions, seemingly indistinguishable from their PS2 cousins. (Subsequent closer inspection at the show does reveal subtle differences – the way grass and gravel sticks to tyres and then depletes on XBox *F1 2001* is possibly the best example of this effect **Edge** has come across in such a game, and a reasonable indication that the developer may potentially achieve far more visual attention to detail using Microsoft's hardware.) Then Castle unveils new title







Robbie Bach shows off XBox's big box along with a selection of games (top right), while Sega's Peter Moore talks excitedly about his company's XBox online plans (top left)

Pirates Of Skullcove Island. Technical gremlins ensure that the soundtrack is heard first, eventually followed by the all-important image. Apparently a non-gamer, Castle soon gets his cleavage-exposing lady pirate (the main character) stuck against two assailants having slid down the side of a hill straight into them, and frantic button pushing inexplicably unleashes an explosion, killing off the duo. Amusingly, he then turns around still expecting to find his opponents there and is genuinely surprised to find they have long (relatively speaking) disappeared. He therefore proceeds to board a ludicrously out-of-scale galleon and engages in a prolonged cannon battle with a little ship. This sequence does appear genuinely entertaining and although the title does show promise, its early state does little to excite the audience. At least the water is very pleasantly rendered on the fly.

Spirits are subsequently raised by Tecmo's Tomonobu Itagaki, Team Ninja leader and producer on *Dead Or Alive 3*. An uncomfortable wait ensues while the tech people fight the system to roll *DOA3* footage, during which time Itagaki-san remains silent on stage, his otherwise emotionless expression just hinting at the frustration he might be feeling at the incompetence of the editing desk. Eventually, the right switch is pressed, the video kicks in, and is then followed by diplomatic comments about the XBbox system rather than gameplay innovations. Still, visually progress is looking very impressive and Itagaki claims that no other current machine could display this quality. Compared to the previous presentation, the crowd breathes a collective sigh of relief.







Sega's *Gunvalkyrie* (top) was a visual XBox highlight at E3, joining conference saviours *Halo* (centre) and *Munch's Oddysee* (above) for Microsoft

Bach returns, understandably very excited, and begins a series of announcements, the first of which is the exclusive licence to one of the more eagerly productions due from nearby Hollywood. Squeaky clean Steven Spielberg pops up in video form to PR the XBox format after tying the knot with Microsoft over rights to forthcoming long-term Kubrick project, 'AI'. Images range from very promising to worrying, with thirdperson segments looking good but flying elements less so. But it's early days.

Bach returns to announce further licences Bruce Lee (*Quest of the Dragon*), and Mike Myers' CGI flick 'Shrek', before introducing Capcom as Microsoft's latest Japanese videogame powerhouse ally.

A charismatic Yoshiki Okamoto, Capcom's managing director, reads through his speech while his robot-like translator does a remarkable job of removing the enthusiasm. The fruits of this latest alliance are outlined in the announcement of *Gemma Onimusha* (an update rather than true sequel), *Dino Crisis 3*, and *BRAIN-BOX* (tentative title), a robot simulation game. Naturally, all three are exclusive to XBox. Video footage of producers Keiji Inafune and Shinji Mikami is (eventually) played along with game coverage, although disappointingly no in-game *Dino Crisis 3* elements are shown, while nothing on *BRAIN-BOX* is seen. Still, the deal represents yet another feather in XBox's expanding cap.

Bach returns to talk about the innovation and excitement his people are bringing with XBox, though **Edge** finds one or two of the titles displayed so far a little too generic to comfortably fit under that description. But then things rapidly improve with the announcement of 27 companies already committed to supporting the XBox online experience. Bach talks enthusiastically about the potential for episodic gaming and reveals the XBox Communicator, a headset designed to render typing in online multiplaying scenarios a thing of the past. This is followed by a short video clip where representatives from Midway, Infogrames, Activision, Eidos, and THQ confirm their support for XBox's online push. Bach then reveals how super excited he is to see so many of the major players behind his vision, before inviting Sega Of America president and COO Peter Moore to face the crowd.

Moore stands on the stage where a year ago he demonstrated console online play with Ice-T to a drunken crowd during 2000's Sega E3 party, and announces *Crazy Taxi Next* and *The House Of The Dead 3*, exclusively for XBox. Interestingly, he goes on to state his belief that the next online battlefield will encompass the sports genre, and accordingly Sega is to bring four such titles for XBox during the course of next year – updates of the company's American football, basketball, baseball and ice hockey franchises. Thankfully, his commitment appears sincere.

Rather than end on a high note, Bach then decides to squeeze in a demonstration of the XBox multiplayer experience by bringing Infogrames' *NASCAR Heat* into focus. Sadly, the presentation is rushed and although the Infogrames representatives on stage are supposedly playing against colleagues backstage and up on the venue's first-floor balcony, the video feed never changes from the mainstage action. Matters aren't helped by the dubious driving skills of the demonstrator, although at least the game looks capable and runs in rather more stable condition than some of the other demos, with no evidence of scenery build-up. Expect two-to-16player online support, as well as Dolby Digital 5.1 sound.

Bach wraps up the proceedings under the discernible eye of a checked crowd. Thankfully for Microsoft, the E3 stand will later remedy matters somewhat.

10:10am, May 16, Biltmore Hotel, Downtown LA

Nintendo has made the Biltmore its base since E3 returned from Atlanta three years ago. It is a relatively plush establishment, and is soberly in keeping with the company's reputation. This sobriety is gnawed into by the existence of countless print and (mostly) Web journos making their way to the Biltmore Bowl conference room, where Nintendo is making its official GameCube debut in the west.

Though the event is scheduled to kick off at 10:30am, by 10:40am the voluminous Bowl is still an absolute mess, camera crews tangling with PR execs and hotel porters keen to attend to the needs of the great and not so good in attendance. It is now standing-room only. **Edge** spots a familiar Nintendo face and questions are asked of this morning's Microsoft conference. Upon learning that it didn't go exactly to plan, the Big N's employee says, with some sincerity and a slight look of concern: "Well, let's hope this is good, then."

Edge is located next to a number of medium-ranking NOA employees. They rub their hands in anticipation of what is to come. It's not clear whether they're anxious, excited, or both.

Finally, under an auspicious 'The Nintendo Difference' banner, **Peter Main**, Nintendo of America's executive vice president, appears, to significant applause. He proceeds to wax lyrical about Nintendo not simply having a finger in the handheld pie, but "complete ownership" – this being a market that has accounted for some 25 per cent of the videogame industry's revenues of the last 12 months, and apparently the only one to show year-on-year growth.

After more huff and puff, he hands over to Satoru Iwata, director and general manager of Nintendo's corporate planning division (and previously a director at close Nintendo partner, HAL), who proceeds to spell out The Nintendo Difference. This has never really been attempted before, with most commentators preferring instead to comically suggest it's some kind of pixie magic, but Iwata-san makes a fair fist of it. Most attendees seem convinced, anyway. Moreover, the charismatic speaker doesn't waste any time in sniping at the rest of the industry's obsession with copying proven hits, which he says will eventually turn videogaming into a commodity business, like VCRs or televisions. With all consoles running the same games, he asks, what is the point of releasing a new format? No, it's clear that Nintendo sees a future where its own hardware runs certain types of games you will not be able to experience on any other platform. The audience seems heartened by this.

Main eventually returns and orders that the GameCube showreel be cranked into

> Satoru Iwata, director and general manager of Nintendo's corporate planning division, proceeds to spell out The Nintendo Difference. This has never really been attempted before

life. You can hear the sharp intakes of breath being taken by the assembled throng. Upon four video screens cascade what seems like a neverending stream of familiar Nintendo characters, the most popular – Link, Mario, Samus, Yoshi, etc – being greeted by hoots of approval. Yes, it might only be another *Super Smash Brothers*, think the masses, but it features all of our favourite Nintendo stars.



It soon becomes clear that Nintendo is leaving few of its franchise stones unturned: the previously seen GameCube *Zelda* footage is shown once more, along with an updated *Wave Race* (see p36), and a token glimpse of GameCube *Mario Kart*, the demo of which consists of a polygonal Mario and Luigi crossing each other on a Mode 7-esque track – something that must have taken all of two weeks to put together. The footage of *Metroid Prime* is particularly scrutinised by attendees. To the apparent perverse pleasure of some, the sequence displays significant framerate deficiencies as it pans around heroine Samus Aran from a thirdperson perspective before going on to depict a number of generic-looking alien creatures and, finally, a mocked-up targetting view, replete with seemingly insignificant but supposedly authentic-looking readouts. Glimpses of the likes of *Kameo* and *Eternal Darkness* are mostly met with shrugs, although they serve to illustrate what lies ahead for Nintendo at the show proper.

It's time for Nintendo to wheel out its big gun. However, in all the occasions **Edge** has witnessed **Shigeru Miyamoto** take the stage, it's never been like this: with a GameCube console in one hand and a controller in the other, he holds them aloft, his Japanese sense of self-restraint seemingly on holiday for today, swaggering to the podium and posing for press photos, beaming like a kid with a new toy.

Miyamoto-san can never do any wrong in the eyes of an American audience, so it is with some reverie that his next words are heeded. "This is our new baby," he says as he places down the GameCube unit. "Like all babies, it is very small. But it can also make a lot of noise!" Cue laughter and the kind of applause a president elect might receive upon returning to a rally in his home state. With the assistance of a translator he proceeds to demonstrate *Luigi's Mansion*. The game offers atmosphere by the bucketful, and super-solid graphics the like of which have never been seen on PS2 or Dreamcast, but attendees seem to be waiting for the punchline. It does not come. Polite chuckles and clapping greet occasional moments (notably when Miyamoto-san enters the game's bathroom and spies a female shadow behind the shower curtain, then attempts to reveal what's actually there by sucking the concealing layer back using Luigi's vacuum cleaner, initially failing and telling the audience that he's not played the game enough to be any good at it). Read more about *Luigi's Mansion* on p32.

Miyamoto-san extolls the virtues of the GameCube controller by way of a colleague aiming a laser pointer at a large-screen representation of the device, taking particular care to hammer home the message that the main button, labelled 'A', will always be the player's 'home' – a place where his or her thumb should come to rest (and it should, given the size of it). Moreover, it's clear that the designer/producer/visionary encourages simplistic interfaces, despite the obvious opportunities afforded by this new control mechanism.

Miyamoto-san's latest labour of love is eventually demonstrated to an audience caught between emotions of 'is that it?' and 'wow, dude'. Here comes *Pikmin*, a game whose name the more jaded hacks in attendance suggest bears more than a coincidental resemblance to another Nintendo hit. As the demo progresses, the game's RTS-style nuances seem lost upon the mostly American audience: the hall sits silent as attendees (unsuccessfully) attempt to get their heads around what's going on. The prevalent attitude is one of 'Is this what we came to see? Where's the new Mario game? What's this *Pikmin* stuff all about?' Upon his arrival back onstage, Main senses some disquiet and attempts to throw it out with talk of *Pokémon*. "Whoever thought that game was going to be so big?" he laughs. Without the fundamental 'catch 'em all' principle, **Edge** wagers that *Pikmin*, though compelling in its own way, will not be another phenomenon upon which Nintendo can hang its hopes in the unlikely absence of other major earners.

Typically for a Nintendo conference, most attendees leave with more questions than answers, although many queries will be resolved on the E3 showfloor over the next three days. Avoiding the scrum-like activity surrounding the international press desks outside of the Bowl (most do not want press discs as much as they want to get their hands of Nintendo's cute GameCube-style rucksacks, it seems), **Edge** heads onwards to more familiar territory.

12:05pm, May 16, Centre Studios, Downtown LA

Edge arrives at LA's Centre Studios fashionably late, and eats. By 1:15pm, with cameras set up on the periphery and professional 'clappers' in place (more on these later), SCEA's conference kicks off. PR director Molly Smith steps on stage for a brief welcome address before handing over to SCEA president and COO Kazuo Hirai. The ever-jovial Hirai-san gives a succinct and general overview of the PS2's US situation before inviting senior vice president Jack Tretton to talk through some interestingly selected sales statistics, thus painting a far rosier picture of the situation than perhaps reality would allow.

Finally, it's time for the games. Naughty Dog's Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin show up to present *Jak And Daxter: The Precursor Legacy*. It's everything **Edge** had been led to believe from talks with selected industry pundits over the past few months – technically exceptional, displaying a solidity

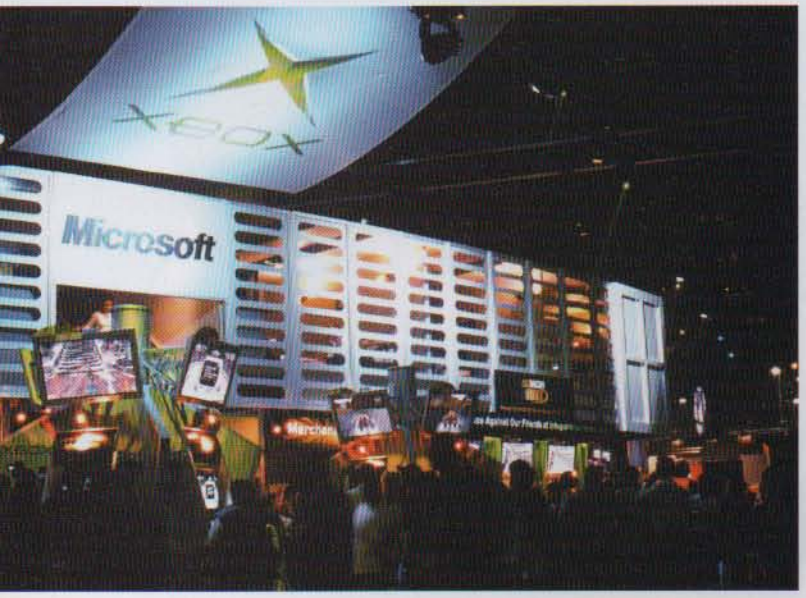






A bullish Shigeru Miyamoto greets the industry at Nintendo's pre-E3 gathering (top). Panasonic's GameCube-and-DVD all-in-one unit was definitely the sexiest hardware at the event, while brief snippets of *Metroid Prime* disappointed

Microsoft's stand (below), despite being on a different hall to the other big players (right), was just as reassuringly packed









As ever, SCEA's conference was a well-attended affair. President and COO Kazuo Hirai took to the stage and talked online strategy by announcing alliances with AOL (providing PS2 owners with email, chat and instant messaging opportunities), RealNetworks (ensuring RealPlayer support), Macromedia (adding Macromedia Flash Player), and Cisco Systems (offering Internet Protocol PS2 optimised software). A decent start, then

rarely seen in titles developed outside NCL's tightly controlled R&D department. However, before long it's clear that the gameplay elements appear less convincing, failing to display the originality previously hoped for. Still, it's a very short demo and proper hands-on experience on the show floor will allow a more accurate appraisal. For now, as Rubin and Gavin wave goodbye, the 'clapper' standing to the left of **Edge**'s row is frantically beating his palms together, thus encouraging all those within earshot to follow suit.

Andrew House, (another) senior vice president, now shows up to talk to the crowd about his team's noteworthy marketing efforts of the PlayStation brand in North America. Most significant is the claim that one of every three US households now own a PlayStation console which, technically, would make Sony's 32bit box a legitimate massmarket achievement.

It's 2:00pm and back in the game with John Shappert, president and general manager of EA's Tiburon Studio. Shappert shows off the latest *Madden* update with improved player faces (they now have wrinkles), new animations, more camera angles and replay modes, better player creation options, and – wait for it – a new opening sequence. The clappers genuinely earn their money this time.

Somehow still conscious after that revelation, the crowd welcomes EA Canada's executive producer Rory Armes together with a more innovative (and exciting) line-up. *SSX Tricky* mixes the firm's highly playable snowboarding venture with elements borrowed from skateboarding titles with seemingly positive results. Also apparently full of character is *NBA Street*, which focuses on the fast-paced world of urban basketball. Finally, *Sled Storm 2* looks fittingly appealing, if a little more predictable than the previous two announcements. The underlying message, of course, is the whole concept of franchise spin-offs, an area that until now the games industry appears to have remarkably underused. Expect this to dramatically change in the near future.

Long-time SCE collaborator Square turns up to promote *FFX* and the forthcoming 'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within' movie, with video footage of both giving the 'clappers' a bit of a breather. Interestingly, the subsequent announcement that *FFXI* will be an online experience, while also well received, appears to wipe clean part of the attendees' memories. **Edge**, on the other hand, still remembers a suspiciously similar claim involving *FFX*...

Capcom's **Shinji Mikami** is next on to the stage and proceeds to present *Devil May Cry* in one of the most entertaining and enthusiastic deliveries **Edge** has had the pleasure to witness. He talks (via an equally cheerful interpreter) of the ethos behind the promising production – everything, he informs with a smile, has to look cool and the game has therefore been designed with this in mind at all times. "Everything will be all right as long as it's cool," he says. As if to prove the point, while on the subject of the control issues Mikami-san draws an imaginary sword from his back, swipes his equally nonexistent opponent high into the air, and shoots him repeatedly with his hands while narrating the universally understandable phrase: "Katana. Tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-ta-ta. Cool." The crowd is enraptured.



Whatever he says afterwards is forever lost following such memorable conduct.

Konami follows. *Silent Hill 2* producer Gozo Kitao talks the crowd through his seriously disturbed project. Video footage plays a mixture of in-game and ageing, though still perfectly affecting, CGI sequences. And despite having witnessed it several times, the imagery continues to perturb the **Edge** crew.

It's time for Konami's other significant PS2 title. Having been informed that this will be his last public appearance before the release of his forthcoming production, the crowd welcomes *MGS2* producer Hideo Kojima on stage with the closest **Edge** has seen to a videogaming standing ovation. He says very little. The video kicks in. At first, sceptics scoff at the re-edited footage, thinking perhaps Konami plans to weasel its way out of this one. But then new material shows up. And, regardless of how jaded a character, no one in the vast hall is left unimpressed by the footage. Kojima-san reveals a lot more than expected – too much, some say – hinting at possible plot twists and a more complex narrative than was previously imagined. The crowd erupts as if relieved that, unlike his predecessing



Konami colleague, Kojima's trailer didn't include a headless torso with rubber-like limbs writhing and shrieking in agony after being shot down at pointblank range. And with a simple thank you and a wave, Kojima-san gracefully withdraws.

SCEA returns to talk about the online side of the PS2 equation. Unlike last year's announcements, things appear a lot more concrete this time around, with specific alliances formed. More importantly, the PS2's dual (analogue/digital) modem prototype is shown, expected to retail for $40 this November (though from the design, **Edge** expects the purchase of the hard drive to be compulsory in order for the former to function). As expected, a move away from the pure gaming arena is scheduled, with email and Internet access forming part of the PS2 experience before Christmas comes round again. True online gaming is also promised for around the same time, of course, though as with so many of these things experience forces **Edge** to adopt a wait-and-see attitude.

Perhaps predicting this response from the journalist-heavy crowd, Sony announces the last title of the presentation: *SOCOM: US Navy Seals*, an online, 16player (compatible with analogue modem) covert operations-based experience developed by Zipper Interactive and due in November. Sadly rushed as a result of overrunning, six members of the developer team manage to get a very brief demonstration in, and, framerate issues aside, things look good, if a little generic. The emphasis is firmly on working as a team and hence comms are achieved via realtime text, menus or a microphone headset similar to XBox's.

Molly Smith returns to close up what has been a surprisingly positive set of proceedings – certainly far more inspiring than last year's equivalent. While US journalists fight over their free bag and info dossier outside, the EU press has yet another conference to digest. In Culver City, at Sony's out-of-town studios, SCEE awaits.

4:54pm, May 16
Culver City Studios

With nearly all press present, and an hour later than planned, SCEE president **Chris Deering** takes to the stage. He's in defiant mood: "This year will prove that PS2 is the system of choice for the massmarket," he boldly announces. Hardly surprising given that his competitors have yet to launch and are only doing so towards the last quarter of the year – PS2 certainly has a head start.

Deering's introductory keynote over, it's Chris Patton's turn at the wheel. The rest of the evening is split among several SCEE representatives, but two aspects remain constant. Fuelling thoughts that Sony is running scared of the competition, an uncommonly bullish attitude and downright insulting use of statistics continues throughout the proceedings. For instance, a graph detailing the take up rate of PS2 is directly compared to the equivalent initial PS sales from some five-and-a-half years ago, with SCEE personnel proudly boasting that the PS2 is selling three times the number of its 32bit predecessor. PS2, the crowd is fed, sold in just two months what it took the PS 13 months to achieve. Not once, however, do any of them bother to point out that the difference in popularity and userbase growth the videogame market now enjoys.

Disappointing, too, is Namco's PS2 line-up. With the exception of *Pac-Man* and *Vampire Night*, the others are straight sequels: *Time Crisis 2*, *Klonoa 2*, *MotoGP 2*, *Ace Combat 4*. Further depression comes in the form of SCEE's Phil Harrison talk of sequels even before some of the originals have been burnt on to a disc. Whereas, to its credit, Microsoft appears keen to avoid the yearly update model, concentrating perhaps on franchise spin-offs or episodic gaming, Sony clearly feels it knows what it's doing. **Edge** would disagree, however. Announcing *This Is Football*, *F1*, and *WRC* follow-ups does much to undermine the positive tone set at the earlier SCEA conference, where a great deal of the software on show promised unexpectedly varied content.

SCEE, however, prefers to play the exclusivity game. *Jak And Daxter*, Harrison announces, will remain a PS2 exclusive for the whole of 2002. The game is likely to sell in similar numbers to Naughty Dog's earlier outing – the pretty, if pretty unremarkable, *Crash Bandicoot* – so at least the marketing men are happy. **Edge**, on the other hand, is far more content with the arrival of thirdparty relations director Zeno Colaço, and his disclosure that the PS2 Performance Analyzer is up and running, currently at SCEE's offices, and is expected to ship to developers in tool form at the end of the year. The 32bit version's arrival during the PlayStation's reign had a massively significant effect on PS developers around the world – it didn't improve standards of content, granted, but it certainly made sure most were up to scratch technically, at least. Given so many developers' complaints over PS2 architecture, this move should ensure they run out of excuses for their technical failings.

Harrison returns to reveal 36 in-house PS2 projects are currently in development, and then asks for a video of ambitious *The Getaway* title to be shown, announcing his approval of Team Soho's decision not to show its game on the show floor. It's difficult to tell much from this brief glimpse, but things would appear to be coming along pleasantly, even if the speed of the proceedings could be improved.

Amid more marketing chat, Studio Cambridge's *Primal* shows up as running footage. Looking more like a more mature version of the studio's accomplished *MediEvil* series, the setting is suitably moody with the central character sharing her time between woman and demon status. One to keep an eye on, certainly. And with that the crowd is sent on its way while journalists are invited to venture into the Software Celebration booth, where most of the major firstparty developed/published titles are waiting.

Edge leaves to reflect on a mixed day. E3 has yet to begin, and yet each player has already taken punches. Significantly, though, all remain standing. For now.

"This year will prove that PS2 is the system of choice for the massmarket," says Deering. Hardly surprising given that his competitors don't even launch until the end of the year









From top: *SOCOM: US Navy Seals*, PS2's major online player; SCEA's *Kinetica* offered seemingly generic futuristic racing; *Run Like Hell* offered some intriguing puzzles; the gorgeous *Maximo*

industryopinion

Edge asks: what were your overall impressions of E3?

I think the XBox team did exactly what we needed to do this week. Just 14 months ago, we announced at GDC our intent to enter the console business and made a lot of promises. E3 was all about demonstrating our commitment and followthrough. We got final hardware out to developers, we showed over 50 titles running on the system, showed retailers what we have planned for them, and had some great products shown by our partners. The early feedback on our online vision seemed to resonate, and I think we had a great party. Overall, I think it was a good show for us and that the team pulled together.

Lowlights were A/V problems at our press conference, air conditioning in our meeting rooms, the limited number of unique, innovative new titles, an emphasis on 'console wars' rather than the revolution we're collectively creating. Highlights were reflecting on how far we've come with our partners, the beach in Santa Monica, playing *Tony Hawk's 2x* on XBox with Tony Hawk, seeing all of the titles running on XBox looking great and not crashing.

Nintendo showed pretty much exactly what I thought they'd show. I'm surprised about the public emphasis around the older gamer, disappointed that they didn't have much in the way of GBA/GC interaction, since I think it's a great concept. Because they've been so quiet all year, I think their showing surprised a lot of people and got a ton of attention; it was a good show for them.

I don't understand what the deal is with Linux, browsers, keyboards, LCDs, extra hard disks, etc. Sony's emphasis around non-gaming has everyone more than a bit confused. It's not clear that the gamer wants this stuff, but I guess it's a strategy to compete with the PC. There was some good excitement around the Naughty Dog title, *Devil May Cry* and *GT3*, but I didn't really see anything that stood out. The volume of titles is clearly there. It will be interesting to see what the quality is like in this wave of titles. As a gamer, I've been pretty disappointed in the portfolio generally. But Sony clearly had the broadest presence and proved that they still have plenty of support from the industry.

I hope that all of this momentum and the innovations in online makes this generation of consoles the one that broadens the gaming audience from 'gamers' to 'everyone'. The ultimate winner in this revolution is the gamer. It's going to be a great year.

J Allard, Microsoft

We enjoyed a very successful E3 this year. Our stand looked excellent and our line-up was stronger than ever, demonstrating our plan to build on our market leadership in '02. We were showing *Harry Potter* for the first time, and it went down a storm. *Medal Of Honour: Allied Assault* on PC was also brilliantly received by both press and retail – the game was showing behind closed doors and there were people trying to fight their way into the private screening room. I was also really impressed with what I saw around the show. Nintendo's GameCube looks stunning and we are very much looking forward to developing our IP for it. EA's games on the PS2 and XBox looked equally exciting. All in all the show demonstrated that EA and the gaming industry have an exciting year coming up.

Paul Jackson, EA

Sega's stated goal is to become the leading publisher of interactive entertainment by holiday 2003. E3 was very successful for us this year, as we were able to demonstrate the amazing line-up of content, franchises and partnerships, with all next-generation videogame platforms, that will allow Sega to achieve our goal.

Sega's show highlight this year was Sega Sports. We strongly believe that sports is the battlefield on which the videogame war will be played in 2001 and beyond. Our strong commitment to Sega Sports was well received at E3 and we are extremely optimistic about the franchise as it is unleashed onto multiple platforms this fall.

I think that all three consoles had a successful showing at E3. Sony unveiled their vision of home entertainment convergence announcing partners like AOL and Macromedia; Microsoft clearly led the way in embracing the Internet and online console gaming, an area in which Sega has been a pioneer for years; and Nintendo demonstrated some extremely interesting content coming to the GameCube.

Peter Moore, Sega of America

I thought this year's E3 was the most exciting ever in terms of hardware releases and new software on show. I think this indicates that this industry is finally starting to live up to its full potential, especially when you see the incredible cinematics of titles like *Medal Of Honour*. For me the high point was the GameCube's controller; the simplicity of its design is just stunning. The low point has to be the food at E3 – munching on a soggy chocolate-chip cookie was hell. As for the new consoles, I can see the GameCube appealing to the younger end of the market, while the XBox made a good showing of titles aimed at the more mature gamer

Peter Molyneux, Lionhead

This year's E3 was very successful for Oddworld. We came into the show thinking of it as a huge focus-testing opportunity as Microsoft was giving us great visibility and support. This gave us the opportunity to let hundreds of people get their hands on the controls of *Munch's Oddysee*. We kept watch of their reactions and gained a lot of useful feedback. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

For me, the highlight of the show was *Warcraft III*'s cinematics. They were absolutely astounding and massively epic in scale. The lowlight was seeing so much of the same old same old. The average game has stronger graphics and effects, but all in all it's the same old gameplay. I had hoped to see more on the creative front. Looking at the consoles for their technical performance and ability, at XBox there was a number of titles that showed smooth texture mapping, per-pixel shading, reflection mapping, and also bump mapping, realtime dynamic lighting, and realtime shadowcasting, smooth antialiasing. Sony is stilled plagued with image-artifact problems. Visual noise on virtually all of the game screens... even on their best titles out of Japan that have been being developed on dev stations for years now.

We were expecting more from Gamecube. We were expecting to see impressive dynamic lighting, but we didn't see any. Even in *Luigi's Castle* with those small rooms and with him carrying a flashlight... no true dynamic lighting. We also didn't see shader complexity like we had expected. I don't recall any large-scale scenes that showed off how well mapping is handled with large distances. Miyamoto titles always show well, but the titles did not reveal hardware capabilities that we were expecting to see.

Lorne Lanning, Oddworld Inhabitants

Although the absence of the sort of quantity of dotcoms displayed last year was noticeable, the show was marked for appearing more upbeat than it has for a while. Strong second-gen PS2 showings combined with XBox demos and a surprisingly positive display by Nintendo reaffirms the broadly held belief that the industry is slowly emerging from its cyclical transition period. However, the company of the show, for me, was Sega, whose strategic and financial restructuring has undoubtedly set the company on course to become, within the next few years, one of the largest thirdparty publishers



industryopinion

Edge invites thoughts on a new Sega

in the world, if not the largest.
Nick Gibson, Durlacher

The show went really well for us. We had four computers on the floor to demo *Dungeon Siege* and people were packed around them the entire show. It was great to see people come back to show their friends or return the next day to play more. The highlight of the show was the over-the-top spectacle that is E3. E3 is like the Willy Wonka Chocolate Factory of videogame development. I want our office to be filled with flat-screen monitors, booth babes dressed like every possible fantasy, and the newest games all lined up waiting to be played.
Jacob McMahon, Gas Powered Games

Like last year I spent a good portion of my time in a small dark room talking to journalists about *TimeSplitters2*. However, I did manage to venture out and get a few definitive impressions from the show. For me the GameCube stood out as the console with the most potential. All the games running on it were fast, smooth, and very polished in appearance. In particular I was impressed by *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, which looked very slick, and *Rogue Squadron II*, which seemed to be drawing a lot of geometry. I also enjoyed *Pikmin* which was a bizarre japanese game which had a lot of character and humour in it. Two elements that are sadly rare in too many games these days.

The XBox stand had some interesting titles, although I felt that most of the software lacked the visual polish of GameCube. *Cel Damage* was a lot of fun and looked like a cross between *Jet Set Radio* and *Micro Machines*. *Munch's Odyssey* looked like it had graphically made the transition to 3D very well; whether the gameplay translates as well I will withhold judgement on until I get a little longer with it. Overall, I think the XBox didn't make as great a splash as I was expecting, but anyone who underestimates Microsoft does so at their own peril.

The PS2 show was as predictable as ever. There was the slick and very playable Gran *Turismo 3* and, of course, the ever-beautiful *Metal Gear Solid 2*. Other than that, most of the other titles still showed the poor framerate and other graphical problems associated with PS2. It seems a lot of developers are still having trouble getting good output from this console. But this is not surprising given Sony's position in the market and the natural arrogance that goes with it. They clearly need to concentrate their efforts on more than just a few big Japanese companies if they want to maintain their leading position in console games.
Karl Hilton, Free Radical

I had a great E3. It was the first time I have had the chance just to walk around and not have to pitch games. I wore one of those devices that counts your footsteps and in only two days I did over 25,000.

I was constantly quizzed about our 'Matrix' videogame, so I just started walking around with a cellphone to my ear. That bought me time to look at the three consoles side by side. My scary conclusion is that I think (for the first time) it's actually worth buying all three. I was not expecting Nintendo to have such a good show, but they did and that kept it a three-horse race.

My advice to the companies? Nintendo: launch as fast as you can in Europe and don't do it pound for dollar. Don't treat Europe as third class. Microsoft: move your ship date slightly forward to get out before Nintendo. Focus on Japan by buying Japanese teams or signing exclusive deals. Sony: drop your price to hurt Microsoft's launch and to make them try to compete. Work hard to demonstrate the second-generation titles to the public (*MGS2* and *GT3*).
Dave Perry, Shiny Entertainment

Crystal Dynamics had a very successful E3, probably our best ever. On the Eidos booth, we showed *Soul Reaver 2* and *Blood Omen II* on PS2, as well as our XBox launch title, *Mad Dash*. The E3 goers were seeing all three titles for the first time.

E3 is always a strange mixture of noise, talking, more talking, aching feet, old friends, parties, and late nights. This year was definitely no exception. It gave off a decidedly transition-year feeling, though. The focus was much more on the games – there didn't seem to be as much money around for extraneous fluff. Booths were a little smaller, and there were fewer booth bunnies and celebrity appearances. Overall I think that this tighter feel for the show was much better.

Games of the show for me had to be the new *Wave Race* on GameCube, and, of course, *Metal Gear* on PS2. *Wave Race*'s weather effects were stunning and it handled just like the original – I have my GameCube on order just to play this game. On the console front, I'd say that it was definitely Sony's year. E3 was full of great PS2 titles, all looking great and playing well at high framerates – developers have, without doubt, cracked the problems they were complaining about last year.
Andrew Bennett, Crystal Dynamics

Another E3, and another clinical 'victory' for Sony. Sure, Microsoft and especially Nintendo stole the industry trade press limelight with their new hardware and (in some cases) intriguing software, but outside their respective stands, Sony's reign almost automatically continued with an overwhelming amount of thirdparty titles on the show floor. The technical quality of many of these games still left a lot to be desired (although it is steadily improving), but the Nintendo and Microsoft hardware wasn't leapfrogging PS2 either, epitomised best perhaps by EA's three near-identical versions of *Madden Football*. Still, most of the show highlights were from XBox or GameCube, with the GC joypad, *Rogue Squadron II*, *Pikmin*, *Munch's Oddysee*, and *Fuzion Frenzy* leading the pack. The only real blemish on what otherwise was one of the more interesting shows in recent years was Nintendo's *Luigi's Mansion*, which, although technically impressive, featured surprisingly shallow gameplay, harking back more to the days of Game&Watch than heralding a new era of next-generation gaming.
Martin de Ronde, Lost Boys Games

GameCube came out fighting, showing the benefits of keeping all your announcements secret right up until the show. A lot of the XBox product had been seen or heard about already, so that diluted the overall impact of the games at the show. Games I'm looking forward to on GameCube include *Pikmin* and *Rogue Leader*, but there still seems to be the situation that Nintendo still don't really like thirdparty developers. PlayStation2 finally had around six or so games I'd spend money on, and it shows that some developers are really getting to grips with the hardware now. The amount of thirdparty support for the format is immense, and it was interesting that, as the console has been out a while now, Sony decided to reveal some of its online plans and new hardware add-ons that seem to be giving the option to turn your PlayStation 2 into a PC. I think Microsoft have done well to go from a set of concepts and ideas on paper to a (very nearly) complete console in the last 18 months. There was some work to do on the games front and overall the XBox games didn't stand out much. However, six months or so of work before launch should ensure that it will be a viable contender in the industry. I'm personally looking forward to *Oddworld* and *DOA 3*, and by the time it launches in Europe I'm sure there will be a few more 'must have' titles.
A developer, anonymous

Big hitters board broadbandwagon

Sony and Microsoft steer a course towards connectivity as E3 announcements strongly indicate that online access will play an important role in their plans





In addition to naming Telewest, Cisco, and AOL as partners for its broadband vision, Sony also unveiled the promising online title *SOCOM: US Navy Seals* (above), which facilitates up to 16 players. Details of further online titles will no doubt follow

Judging by the wave of announcements made at E3, Sony and Microsoft have moved their chest-beating from the realm of mere technical specifications to the more rarefied heights of broadband connectivity. As well as the raft of announcements made at E3 by Sony with heavyweight partners such as Cisco Systems and AOL, SCEE has announced an agreement with UK cable operator, Telewest, which will see the two companies trialing Europe's first console-accessible broadband network.

That broadband connectivity should provide the backdrop for the next stage of the competition for the space under the consumer's TV should come as no surprise. On the one hand, broadband service providers see gaming as an application that has the potential to drive broadband uptake. For Telewest, the opportunity is there to drive usage among its existing base of 500,000 digital customers, and potentially adding more. As games content manager **Tom Cotter** puts it: "On the network side of things we're looking at games being a catalyst for broadband. The applications we're principally looking at are downloading new features and multiplayer gaming." With PlayStation2 services potentially sitting alongside Telewest's current offering of games – typically aimed at the more casual end of the gaming market – the agreement also offers Telewest the chance to extend its gaming audience right across the spectrum.



Indeed it's the enhanced feature set – and the possibility of new revenue streams – that makes broadband connectivity such an enticing prospect for gamers, developers, publishers, and, of course, the console manufacturers themselves. "From our perspective we've got a machine that's capable of a lot more than just playing retail discs," explains SCEE's director of new business development, **Nainan Shah**. "There's an awful lot that it can achieve, and it's designed to achieve an awful lot on the network. The memorandum of understanding that we've achieved is to try and do a number of things in a step by step way in the broadband environment. We do think that from publishers and the content community, as well as our own development group, there's an interest and a desire to exploit network capabilities."

"We're looking at games being a catalyst for broadband. We're looking at downloading new features and multiplayer gaming"



The network adapter and hard drive unit, displayed here at E3, will plug into the PS2

Online opportunities

Outlining the potential for broadband connectivity to reshape console gaming, Shah continues: "At one level there's multiplayer gaming of the type that is familiar, which is one thing that we're trying to achieve. Equally, one of the advantages of the network is that it's a great way of delivering up-to-date information, or demos. And then there is a lot of technology that is still to be worked on and developed to do some very interesting stuff. This could include the ability to play without a disc, which already happens on a PC, but it's something that we think we could do with the ease and simplicity of the PlayStation. And then there's a whole range of things that creators can do. We'll build the infrastructure, and then it's a question of what the publishers and developers want to do with it. We'd love to have people talking to each other while they play, or to see each other." Perhaps the most striking opportunity, though, is to provide surprise downloads, or regular downloads – raising the possibility of a convincing episodic experience.

Before this can happen, though, there are certain obstacles to overcome – in particular the limited availability of broadband. As SCEE president, **Chris Deering**, explains, the plug-and-play ethos of a console is at odds with the disparate competing technologies that have hindered the rapid uptake of broadband: "Within cable there are dozens of different APIs. What we're really about is developing something that looks indistinguishable from the regular TV/console experience." Which is crucial if another impediment – lack of consumer understanding – can be surmounted.

"We don't actually think consumers need to think of this as a 'broadband service' any more than they think of television as a 'broadband service'," argues Shah. "It's just something that you do easily at your television with your set-top box and your console, and it shouldn't necessarily involve a high degree of tech savvy." But there remains the need to educate users about what exactly 'online gaming' will mean after broadband connectivity is introduced to the solid-state architecture of consoles.

"We need to work as an industry in coming up with some technical distinctions," explains Deering. "Right now, online gaming





Telewest games content manager Tom Cotter (left) and SCEE president Chris Deering believe in broadband

is *Ultima* or *EverQuest*, but tomorrow that will change." This may be so, but it remains to be seen whether gamers will be put off by the cost of acquiring the necessary hard drive and network adapter add-ons and the optional LCD screen, keyboard and mouse.

Experimental deal

But what the agreement between Telewest and SCEE provides is the opportunity to address some of these hurdles, as well as exploring and refining the possible feature enhancements and the revenue opportunities that they will bring. Both companies are at pains to stress the experimental nature of the deal, and – perhaps rightly given historical precedent – are wary of overinflating consumer expectation. "We have to be really careful that we don't inadvertently set expectation levels that are going to end up disappointing," reasons Deering. "The baby steps that will come first in Europe may just be transmitting a score, or getting a message when a new player is available. Then, little by little, we'll be adding realtime-enhanced gaming features, or downloaded enhancements. The Telewest deal is really about looking to two, three, or four years out, and what kind of experiences can conceivably be delivered to the masses in that broadband environment."

But in three or four years, how will this deal have affected the industry in general, and particularly the competition between Microsoft and Sony? Although Microsoft's J Allard used E3 to outline a new theme park allegory to illustrate the XBox approach towards online gaming, it would appear that the Redmond giant is seeking a greater degree of control and ownership over the broadband subscriber than Sony. Whether the company's widespread shareholdings in various broadband providers will be sufficient to overcome the reluctance of those operators to offer up their massive investment in laying infrastructure into the ground is another question. For Telewest, one of those companies in which Microsoft holds a stake, the issue is clear. "Microsoft still believes in our broadband strategy, and continues to be a stakeholder in Telewest," argues Cotter. "We're with Sony because they understood what we wanted from our assets, and they understood our broadband strategy. They are first to market and the market leader."

While Nintendo seems prepared to sit out the initial stage of competition for broadband connectivity, Deering remains philosophical: "There are going to be things that emanate from this that benefit competitors, or people outside the game business. So be it. We want to light the spark. The flames will spread, we think. This is a catalytic project."

With the PlayStation2 network adapter shipping to the US this winter, it looks like it's some way off before this deal will come to commercial fruition. But, as Deering explains, the broadband future is very much set to appear: "There are a lot of very simple rules of the road that have to be written before we can massively expand. But it's going to happen."

Gaming 24:7 with the Big N

Nintendo presents the marketing strategy for the launch of its next-gen handheld, underlining the company's focus on titles over tech specs











Nintendo's new Gaming 24:7 slogan might not be the most inspired piece of branding ever, but TV adverts like 'Gents' seem strong enough to let parents everywhere know that a new phenomenon is arriving

Nintendo will be launching Game Boy Advance in Europe and the UK with an ambitious £30m marketing campaign on June 22. As part of the campaign, the company will be unveiling its new 'Gaming 24:7' brand, which will also appear in forthcoming Nintendo campaigns, including the Spring 2002 launch of GameCube. With the total number of units sold since the Game Boy's inception now standing at 114m, there is some way to go before the Game Boy Advance matches the commercial success of its forerunner, but the Japanese launch of the newer model, which has so far seen sales of over a million units, has set a positive precedent for its introduction to the UK.

Thirteen titles at launch

Game Boy Advance will launch in Europe with a line-up of 13 titles, including three developed by Nintendo, and 40 titles are promised to appear by Christmas. *Super Mario Advance*, *F-Zero: Maximum Velocity*, and *Kuru Kuru Kururin* will all boast multiplayer capabilities. The unit will be available in four different shades – purple, white, clear blue and clear red – but although Nintendo's semi-transparent models have historically proven more popular, Nintendo of Japan's recent decision to discontinue opaque models after April may precipitate a surge in demand for these.

It's still unclear what Nintendo's strategy will be with regard to its existing catalogue of Game Boy Color units and software, but it could be argued that the massive existing user base could be an obstacle to the initial adoption of the GBA. Nevertheless, **David Gosen**, managing director of sales and marketing at Nintendo of Europe remains confident: "We at Nintendo of Europe have challenged ourselves to change the way people perceive handheld gaming and have set ourselves some very ambitious targets. Game Boy is an icon. The launch plan challenges some long-established media principles – we've come up with a far-reaching pan-European strategy to target a highly mobile, media-savvy group. The quality of the Game Boy Advance experience and the new media approach will deliver some outstanding results."





Throughout Nintendo's multimedia Game Boy Advance assault, the theme is of the level of immersion provided by its new piece of hardware. These posters will appear nearer launch

> "We have challenged ourselves to change the way people perceive handheld gaming and have set ourselves very ambitious targets"

Sticking to their guns

In light of this 'media-savvy' audience, the new Gaming 24:7 brand may appear slightly insipid, but it is entirely in keeping with the company's message at E3. Keeping its distance from the Sony/Microsoft tech-spec willy-waving that has typified next-gen hype to date, Nintendo has shown itself keen to emphasise content over technical capabilities. To this end, there are a number of sophisticated print and television ads accompanying the European launch to educate consumers (and presumably the nation's parents) about the merits of Game Boy Advance, such as the 'Gents' TV spot, depicting a gamer who is so engrossed that he 'seeks relief without moving his hands from the game'.

Whether this will be necessary for what is surely one of the most eagerly anticipated of the next-gen console line-up is another point, but with retailers taking preorders at the time of writing, the commercial success of the launch looks set to match the creative success of the accompanying marketing campaign.

Nintendo intends to provide rolling updates on how the launch is progressing and other sundry GBA info at www.gameboyadvance.co.uk.





Crawfish-developed movie tie-ins *Ecks vs Sever* and *Driven* – based on the Stallone vehicle of the same name – were on display at E3 and are evidence of the high quality of GBA titles

Scandinavians get easy access

US company Media Station joins with NextGenTel and B2 Bredband to introduce a broadband gaming service across Scandinavia from September

The prospect of widespread availability of gaming on demand came one step closer this month, as US company Media Station extended the reach of its Media Remote technology to Scandinavia. Through technology licensing agreements with NextGenTel, a broadband service provider in Norway, and B2 Bredband, which has networks in both Norway and Sweden, Scandinavian PC owners will be granted unlimited access to libraries of games in return for a monthly subscription. With Scandinavian broadband provision well advanced, the service could provide a useful testing ground before a more widespread European rollout of similar services.

"The Scandinavian market is one of the leading areas for broadband penetration and deployment in Europe," notes Media Station's European business director, **Keith Fergie**. "The combination of Media Station's technology and services and B2 Bredband's superior infrastructure will create a showcase environment for software on demand, particularly within the gaming community." Both NextGenTel and B2 Bredband intend to commence services from September, the former as part of its BroadPark portal, the latter over its 10Mb Ethernet network.

"The B2 Bredband announcement represents the second major technology licensing agreement for Media Station in Europe in less than two weeks," points out **Jim Maslyn**, president and CEO of Media Station. "It's representative of the broadband growth taking place in Europe."

Media Station's existing US service, Select Play, gives some indication of what European users can expect. Available over several networks, including those of Time-Warner Cable and Comcast, users pay a monthly subscription charge in return for the ability to play a selection of popular titles, such as *Roller Coaster Tycoon* or *Planescape Torment*, or coin-op classics like *Centipede*. These games are installed on a server residing with the broadband service provider, and subscribers are entitled to unlimited access per month. Service providers can also develop their own content, as both NextGenTel and B2 Bredband intend to do.

With a raft of big-name publishers signed up to Media Station's distribution technology – including Activision, Infogrames and Disney Interactive – and the potential for increased earnings by cutting out the retail middleman, it can't be long before the technology spreads to the UK.





Media Station CEO Jim Maslyn (above left) is bullish about the European opportunity for his company's gaming-on-demand technology

The BAFTAs are back

Awards go glitzy with a shift of venue to the Grosvenor House Hotel as they enter their fourth successful year of competition





Last year's host Phill Jupitus (below left), and Rare's Chris Stamper (left) – a past winner with *Perfect Dark* (above)



While it's unlikely that celebrated £50,000-a-night man Angus Deayton will be presenting the BAFTA Interactive Entertainment awards anytime soon, it is a testament to the organisation's continued success that this year's event will be held at the prestigious Grosvenor House Hotel in London, the same venue as BAFTA's more high-profile TV awards.

Taking place on October 25, the BAFTA Interactive Entertainment awards are now in their fourth year and encompass such diverse disciplines and media as art installations, WAP, CD-ROMs, DVDs, Web sites, digital television, and, of course, videogames.

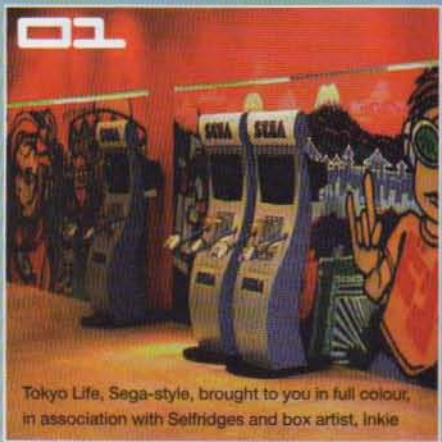
Past winners from the videogame industry include Rare, *Pokémon Yellow*, *Deus Ex*, *Perfect Dark*, and *Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*, and if you fancy looking to join their ranks this year, you're advised to get applications in now.

"Preparations are already well underway for this year's Interactive Entertainment awards, which will be the biggest, best and brightest yet," says **Sue Thexton**, chair of BAFTA's Interactive Entertainment Committee. "The number of entries we received last year, as well as the overwhelming demand for tickets to the event, has proved that the industry has embraced these awards as their own."

There will be a total of 20 categories this year, but the most important for **Edge** readers will no doubt be the best game categories, with a separate award for mobile games, networked games, PC games, and console games. The awards will be judged by a panel of professionals drawn from across the interactive entertainment industries, and chaired by members of the BAFTA Interactive Entertainment Committee.

Naturally, applicants can submit their entries electronically at the BAFTA Web site (www.bafta.org), or can contact Joy Barrett on 020 7292 5823 for an application form. The closing date for entries is July 31, with a reduced rate for entries received by June 30.

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE

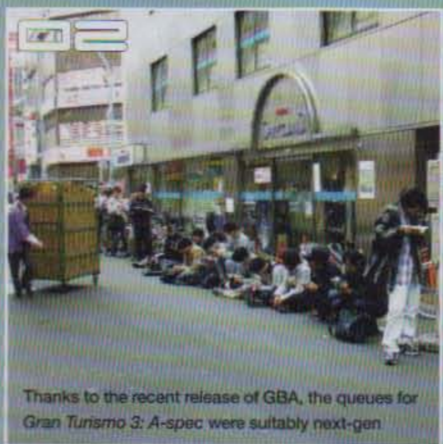


Tokyo Life, Sega-style, brought to you in full colour, in association with Selfridges and box artist, Inkie





Supercool Space Channel 5 heroine, Ulala, was one of the sassiest highlights of the Tokyo Life exhibition



Thanks to the recent release of GBA, the queues for *Gran Turismo 3: A-spec* were suitably next-gen



Most copies of *GT3* sold out in a few hours, but more surprising was the takeup of racing wheels



01 Tokyo Life gets Inkie

UK: Anybody straying into Selfridges earlier this month might have been forgiven for thinking that they'd wandered into a little piece of Akihabara in London. As part of the department store's Tokyo Life exhibition, which ran from May 1 to June 12, Selfridges and Sega enlisted the help of graf artist Inkie to give part of the ground floor a Japanese skate-cool flavoured makeover. Joining Ulala, Beat, and a Crazy Taxi were five Dreamcast pods allowing passers-by to indulge in perhaps the most appealing element of Tokyo life. You can see more of Inkie's work at www.inkie.co.uk.

02 Driven to distraction

Japan: Speaking of Akihabara, after receiving a warm reception from the Japanese gaming press, it comes as no surprise that the streets were thronged in Japan's gaming district in anticipation of the launch of Sony's *Gran Turismo 3: A-spec*. Most shops sold out of the title in a matter of hours, but unlucky punters could always have got a short term fix at a specially organised game festival to promote the launch. Predictably, given this level of interest, sales of the software have already reached a million in Japan. What does come as a surprise, though, is that sales of the GT Force racing wheel peripheral have also soared, with the most recent estimate suggesting that, after sales of half a million, almost one in two *GT3* owners have also splashed out on the controller.

Soundbytes

"One suspects that initially the problem of finding people who are connected via broadband and also have an XBox and want to play the same game as you at the same time will feel like Level 12 of Finding The Needle In The Haystack"
The future of online gaming according to **Charles Arthur** in *The Independent*

"I kept finding myself totally trapped, going round and round the same rooms and galleries again and again. It was a Kafkaesque sensation"
Former *Times* literary editor, **Derwent May**, turns Bad Dad to try his hand at Clive Barker's *Undying*

"I'm killing the Empire, darling"
A **Joystick Junkies party attendee**, playing *Star Wars*, responds to his girlfriend, who's innocently asked him what he's doing

"Microsoft was finished before it even got started. They have no games... Microsoft does not understand the entertainment business. The processing speed of their console is not fast enough and the graphics were rough"
Sony supremo **Ken Kutaragi** dismisses the upstarts from Redmond

"The performance of different consoles has become so similar it is difficult to tell whether you are using PlayStation2 or Sega's Dreamcast"
Alexandra Harney, of the *FT*, confirms some long-held suspicions

03 MindRover matters

US: Whether it's edutainment or toy, *MindRover: The Europa Project* has been highly acclaimed in the US, notably from **Edge**'s sister magazine, *NextGen*, which awarded it an impressive five stars out of five. Now that it's being made available in the UK thanks to CogniToy, budding 'Robot Wars' contenders can cut their teeth while exercising their brains with this robot construction simulator. Slightly more complex than the PlayStation's *Carnage Heart*, *MindRover* is set on the icy wastes of Europa, one of Jupiter's moons, and sees players charged with the task of building and programming robots to overcome a series of challenges. Using an elaborate but user-friendly set of programming tools, robots can be equipped with a wide set of components ranging from rocket launcher to radar, in order to win races, solve puzzles, find their way through mazes, and beat up other robots. It's available from www.mindrover.co.uk, or by cheque made payable to Orsett Computer Consultancy Limited at 2 Brockett Road, Grays, Essex, RM16 4SR for £24.95.

04 Gay Science is Unreal

Austria: Given that the debate about videogame violence looks unlikely to abate any time soon, it seems ironic that a city that was home to Hitler during the formative years of his life should provide the setting for one of the more interesting ways that the technology of gaming is being shoehorned into the services of education. As part of a collaboration between ten Austrian museums, two Viennese artists – Sylvia Eckermann and Mathias Fuchs – have created a 'semantic matrix for cross-disciplinary exhibition', using Epic's Unreal engine. Running in a building at Karmelitermarkt in Vienna's second district, from May 1 until June 30, the exhibition allows three users to enter a virtual space based on exhibits from the Jewish Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Museum of Natural History, among others. Inspired both by Nietzsche's concept of 'Gay Science' – a mode of experiencing knowledge in a joyful as well as thoughtful manner – and Renaissance symbolism, the work seeks to allow users to make useful associations. Or as Fuchs puts it: "We consider the technology of a computergame as a helpful tool for the mediation of complex content and… to allow for individually shaped relational networks inside a complex field of knowledge." Quite.

Data Stream

- Number of lines of dialogue featured in the *Deus Ex* script: **over 10,000**
- Number of speaking parts in *Deus Ex*: **over 400**
- Font size of *Deus Ex* script, printed for transportation to Dallas: **nine**
- Number of binders required for the transport of script to Dallas: **13**
- Fall in Nintendo's operating profits for the year to the end of March 2001: **42 per cent**
- Increase in Sega's operating losses for the year to the end of March 2001: **29 per cent**
- Average number of videogame characters named by 1,000 18-22-year-olds in Dixons survey: **eight**
- Average number of Cabinet politicians named by 1,000 18-22 year-olds in Dixons survey: **four**
- Average number of shadow Cabinet politicians named by 1,000 18-22 year-olds in Dixons survey: **2**
- Number of times Tony Mott's 'Back' topic on the **Edge** forum had been read at time of writing: **194**

03



At last UK gamers can attempt to better themselves thanks to the brain-building properties of *MindRover*



Players can equip their robots with a variety of components, some essential, some more of a luxury



Combine a judicious selection of components with some inventive programming and victory is assured



After a robot is suitably equipped it needs to know how to behave, which is where this screen comes in

04



Does this mean that we'll all be discussing the effect of art on the causes of violence in the future?





The architecture of the knowledge space is designed to create useful associations in the mind of the user





Spend your time indoors playing videogames and you too could look as healthy as these specimens





The next generation of corporate toy. Will they prove as effective as surreptitious gaming devices, though?







It may not look like much, but for budding Aphex Twins, Nanoloop could be just a starting point



The country's first academic conference devoting to videogames will be taking place at the end of June



Get down to Bristol's Watershed cinema for some big-screen gaming, culminating in a *Pac-Man* comp

05 Twenty-four hour gaming people

UK: Game Network, the UK's first 24 hour TV channel dedicated to games, launched on May 8. Featuring the usual news, reviews, previews and magazine-style programming, the channel kicked off by showing interviews with the likes of Tony Hawk, Mat Hoffman, and Peter Molyneux. **Edge** remains unconvinced by the credentials of the presenters, though. Surely those healthy tans can't be the result of years indoors perfecting hi-scores...

06 Executive decisions to make

UK: With titles like Infogrames' *V-Rally* making a concerted bid for the corporate penny by appearing on Palm Pilot, **Edge** took a look at Psion's 'future concept' models, ACE and HALO. The former is a handheld communicator, allowing the user to view up to three independent screens of information, while the latter is a projection communicator that can be worn around the neck – surely jeopardising those illicit games of *V-Rally*.

07 Peripheral Advances

US: Edge can't help thinking that one or two of the GBA-obsessed peripheral manufacturers at E3 may have missed the point. GBA owners lamenting the portability of the device will no doubt be thankful for a peripheral that enables games to be played on a TV screen, and those with frustratingly large hands will be delighted at the prospect of an add-on that transforms the GBA into a more manageable (though less portable) Lynx size. But among the ideas that did stand out were bam! entertainment's prototype radio control cartridge, and, although originally designed for Game Boy Color, Nanoloop's synthesiser/sequencer (available to order at www.nanoloop.com).

08 The gaming Watershed

Japan: As part of the 'Games At Watershed' exhibition, Bristol's Watershed cinema will be running a big-screen *Pac-Mac* competition culminating in a final on June 29, and, finally, a three-day conference running from June 29 until July 1, entitled 'Game Cultures'. For more information, see www.watershed.co.uk/games.

Continue

New-found optimism in the industry
Abundant smiles at E3 point towards renewed faith
Edge's newly acquired office karaoke machine
For obvious reasons
Infogrames' 'rocks my world' E3 showtune
So downright awful, it's great

Quit

Over-enthusiastic American gaming Otaku
Showing how to embarrass yourself at Nintendo's pre-E3 conference
GamerWeb.com – the magazine
Web site dying on its backside? Hey, launch a print version. Er...
Golden coins and other shiny collectables
All over E3 like an itchy rash. Where has all the innovation gone?

OUT THERE
MEDIA

09 Net_condition

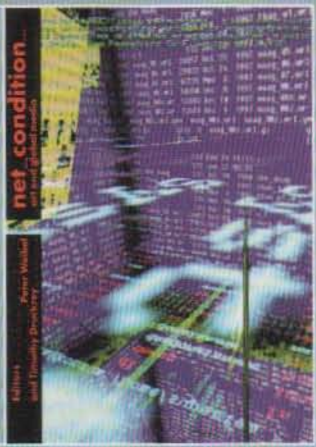
'Net_Condition' is a collection of essays pulled from art and social critique masquerading as a coffee table book. This alone should alert readers to its subversive agenda. But let's begin more lightly with a (less paranoid or pretentious-sounding) quote from the opening essay by co-editor Timothy Druckrey: 'Deeply powered by government and corporate technologies, the Net has well-established continuities with the trajectory of frenzied globalisation, even while it is often marketed as 'revolutionary', counter-cultural, and democratically empowering'. Got that? In English, he's saying: 'The Net isn't as free as you think', which sums up the tension felt throughout this doorstop of a tome. The liberating power of the Internet vs the ever-increasing control corporations are fighting to exert over it. It is deeply concerned with this knife-edge balance between control and anarchy, and it eloquently proceeds to outline its evidence. Stuffed between the pages of arty nonsense, a bemusing example of which is NetoMat – the 'anti-browser' that 'eschews the anachronistic page structure of today's Web by not privileging layout and design' – are some Net-art gems. There is a testimony of the realworld domain name fight between etoy.com (the Swiss arts collective) and Etoys.com (the toy retailer which recently went into liquidation), and several tales from more bizarre corners of the Net. If you have the patience and mental energy to see through the vast swathes of foggy commentary, it can be an inspiring read. It is both an encyclopedia of Net art and a manifesto for challenging common perceptions of the Web.

10 Nothing But Blue Skies

It's about time English weather became the subject of a novel, don't you think? So here's a stab: a tongue-in-cheek pseudo-scientific joke about why it's always raining – the cover for Tom Holt's bittersweet study of the human psyche from the perspective of a dragon. Welcome to a Pratchett-esque London where it's perpetually wet. Why? Because of the dragons, of course. These mythical creatures are all too irritatingly real – and when they get upset, as they frequently do, it rains. And boy, does it rain. Just like your average British summer. Meet Karen, a Chinese water dragon turned human estate agent. In god-like fashion, Karen's emotional highs and lows bring out the sun or bring on the rain, but the cause of her inner turmoil is all too human: she's in love, and worse than that, it's unrequited. As we follow Karen's tortured dragon heart, Holt takes us on a sci-fi joyride, slamming *Windows*, introducing a depressed alcoholic weatherman, an adjutant general to the dragon king of the north-west who's been turned into a goldfish by rebellious TV weathermen, and a megalomaniac Australian media baron (definitely not Rupert Murdoch). The result is a fast, fun, twisty-turny plot that keeps you on your toes. Holt may be the heir apparent to Douglas Adams, but based on existing evidence his talents fall short of that genius. This is an entertaining novel competently written by a highly agile mind, but Adams did it bigger and better, and while Holt is undoubtedly witty, he has difficulty putting it on the page.

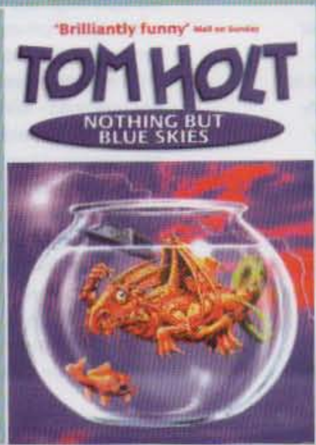
09

Editors: Peter Wiebel, Timothy Druckrey
Publisher: MIT Press
ISBN: 026273138X



10

Author: Tom Holt
Publisher: Orbit
ISBN: 1841490407



11



Site: **The Dot Eaters**
URL: **www.emuunlim.com/doteaters/**

11 Web site of the month

Anybody who has had their archivist appetites whetted by recent forays into the dark ages of videogaming like 'The First Quarter' or 'Thumb Candy' could do worse than look to Dot Eaters for inspiration. Boasting a comprehensive assortment of screenshots, cabinet shots, as well as some staggeringly impressive photos of the earliest cyber creators, this is as informative as it is at times unintentionally hilarious, and should bring out the nostalgic in all but the most hard-hearted gamer.

12



12 Advertainment

Japan: Three days before release, various versions of *GT3: A-spec* adverts bombard the Japanese television networks. Surely this is the most simple ad treatment ever showcased in these pages.

01-03: Engine sound can be faintly heard in the background as what looks like a Mitsubishi Lancer Evo WRC car suddenly appears over a gentle brow
04-06: Engine note rapidly augments, you realise it is an Evo WRC and the brow turns out to be a lot more pronounced than first impressions had led to believe
07-11: The Evo launches impressively into the air and almost immediately fades into the familiar *GT3* logo, complete with obligatory release information...
12: ... which is swiftly followed by PS equivalent



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

The gender game and how it parties

Charged with compiling a list of the most existence-crushingly painful aspects of the videogame industry's annual decampment to Los Angeles for the Electronic Entertainment Expo, RedEye would bypass socially inept Yank Web journos, their tide-marked jumbo *EverQuest* T-shirts groaning across even more elephantine torsos, past besuited PR cattle, their spiel about as convincing as that of whichever pharmaceutically enhanced visionary once termed this the City of Angels, and opt for flesh. Flesh of the female persuasion, that is. More specifically, the hectares of silicone-curved, coconut-creamed, tanning-shop-grilled meat which accounts for 80 per cent of the perceived appeal of the hired hands charged with luring attendees to new gaming peripherals, 'hugely innovative' cartoon-licensed titles, and far beyond.

It is 11am on the second day of the show. Entering E3's south section, RedEye is approached by two 'booth babes', as they are at once affectionately and suspiciously referred to here.

"*Show Daily*?" chimes the first, merrily, proffering a copy of the event's official morning update and smiling like a genuine basket case.

Having spent the previous evening in the company of a number of several industry types who really should know better, RedEye is in no mood to refuse much at this point: "Oh… yes. Thank you."

"Oh, you're English!"

"Well… yes."

"Oh, I love the English accent."

The second hired hand steps in with equal enthusiasm. The scene is steeped in so much cliché that all RedEye can do is make his excuses and leave, heading into the south hall itself to be confronted by another day's worth of attendees smothering each other in an effort to be the next to be photographed with his arm slung around the waist of an obliging portion of just about every software company's show budget. Indeed, the softcos encourage it. Come to E3! Sample the latest games! Snuffle up to the kind of girls you'd previously only encountered in your mind's eye and in the company of your personally favoured variety of absorbent material!

It is difficult to lay blame on the software industry for this type of tactic. After all, don't videogames go with guys-who-can't-get-chicks like all-day Internet access goes with reduced productivity in the workplace? It's the give-'em-what-they-want ethic writ super-large, and it seems to work like a dream.

What's of more concern this year, however, is that the hired hands are competing for attention with two of the most anticipated pieces of gaming technology ever conceived – XBox and GameCube – and often winning. So, are hardcore gamers actually more into womankind than they are new electronic entertainment boxes? Can this really be true?

Maybe if gamers looked upon E3 content as they might some form of actual party involving a swathe of the fairer sex, they'd look with a new kind of perspective. Let's take this year's E3 and transmogrify it into a swanky party in LA…

There's the girl you'd been told was definitely going to be here. She's a party regular, but with a reputation for being 'difficult'. Many have dabbled with her delights, some with more success than others. Those who've messed up? Their stories have been recounted many times over. Guests eye her with some suspicion. The female contingent looks on with jealousy, wondering exactly what she did to command this level of attention. But she thinks it's her party; everyone else has come to see her.

'Come to E3! Sample the latest games! Snuffle up to the kind of girls you'd previously only encountered in your mind's eye!'

You hear laughter from the other side of the room. Ah, there she is – someone you'd heard might be here, but you've been hearing all sorts of stories about her for so long now that you no longer knew what to believe. She's entertaining everyone, throwing drinks around, letting her hair down, just here to have fun. No one seems to care what she does in order to raise a smile: she's from a respected lineage. Okay, so the party kicked off at 9pm and she didn't turn up until 11pm, but she turns out to be worth waiting for. For a while she is the toast of everyone – albeit some reluctantly – until it turns out she has to be home by midnight. She skips out of the door, hair jangling in bunches, her gaudily coloured dress wisping around as she waves goodbye to everyone, and male guests' gazes are cast back into the bottom of their glasses.

Suddenly word turns to another high-profile female guest, another who many thought might not make it tonight. You catch sight of her. She's a rangy specimen, and apparently sophisticated, holding court to a raft of potential suitors from the recesses of a couch. Despite the initial frostiness, however, she seems eager to appease the attentions of anyone and everyone who happens her way. She's new in town, apparently, and from a wealthy background. Accordingly, many male guests fawn over her as she reclines. Others, in huddles, speak in hushed tones about what she might be able to do for them, as opposed to what they might do for her.

What was initially a small gathering on the party's diminutive dancefloor is now a sweaty, heaving mass, and the familiar female figure from earlier in the evening has leapt upon the stage, to the whoops and hollers of the partygoers. She dances in a kind of 'didn't you know I could do this?' fashion, and more whoops are exhaled, more fists are punched into the air, and more expensive drinks are spilled on to expensive carpeting. Some will rue the evening's dalliances come tomorrow morning.

The remaining newcomer, sensing a shift in atmosphere, raises apologetic-looking hands to her entourage and motions towards the dancefloor. She rises from the couch and makes her way across the room – only to bump into a table of drinks, sending them crashing to the floor. Reeling around, attempting to steady herself, she grabs at a curtain, ripping its delicate fibres, and stumbles backwards into a passing waiter, who tumbles into the fireplace. Those who'd previously swooned over her apparent delights cough nervously, while others simply roll their eyes. Some offer to help her up.

It remains to be seen whether or not she'll be invited to the party next year.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Immersion: there are two sides to every story

Videogames are often praised for their immersive qualities, but what exactly does this mean? It's an odd metaphor to choose. A game is not immersive in the same way as a jacuzzi: a jacuzzi induces blissed-out relaxation, whereas a game ideally provokes massive levels of adrenaline-fuelled stress alternating with triumphal relief. (Such emotions could in theory be had in a jacuzzi, but you'd need the help of other people.) Immersivity in videogame terms, on the other hand, seems to be code for a feeling of actually 'being there'. But is being there always enough?

One way to enhance the feeling of 'being there' is to render your gameworld with massive poly counts, beautiful textures and so on. Konami's intriguingly flawed *Shadow Of Memories*, for example, builds its mittel-European city with impressive love, and increases the sense of a persistent, actual environment because it changes informationally over time – the seed that gets planted in medieval times becomes a gnarly old tree towering over the town square in the game's present. But its stilted, prescripted conversations betray the carefully wrought illusion.

Shenmue's trump card, on the other hand, is that it allows the player to make a wide variety of redundant choices. Which flavour of soda shall I drink? Shall I have a look at that photograph? Most of the time, these choices simply don't matter. Hence a certain species of immersivity: the feeling that you can noodle happily around in a gameworld that contains information not directly relevant to your quest. After all, whatever popularisations of chaos theory tell us, it is clear that we make hundreds of redundant choices every day in real life. This species of immersivity is most powerfully provoked, perhaps, by Miyamoto's two N64 *Zelda* masterpieces.

But a highly immersive game must also convince the player that he or she really matters to the gameworld. The flipside to redundant choices must be the option of making other choices that have immediate and important effects. *Shenmue* fails here, because it effectively leads the player on rails through the whole game. *Deus Ex*, on the other hand, is a paradigm of rich and meaningful choice, because it boasts both a consistent gameworld and a plethora of strategies and gadgets with which to assail its objectives. It offers the player a wide selection of things to 'say', then listens to him very carefully, and renders a trail of believable consequences.

So far, these standard strategies of immersivity have been one-way: let's draw the player into the gameworld. Indeed, it is often thought that the player's psychological involvement in a videogame is a kind of fragile spell, a suspension of disbelief, that must not be broken. Yet there is an alternative paradigm that deliberately breaks this rule. It has only been rarely tried in videogames thus far, although it has been exploited in other artforms for hundreds of years. It rests on the idea that exposing the illusion makes the illusion stronger. Let's call it counter-immersivity.

Take, for example, Mark Z Danielewski's brilliant recent novel of weird topography, film studies and intellectual terror, 'House Of Leaves'. Where the fat, panoptic novels of the 19th century aimed for transparent believability, Danielewski's tale is told by a gaggle of eccentric narrators, and the novel continually acknowledges its own status as a crafted, printed text. "Hey, I'm just a novel," it keeps saying to the reader, but that doesn't make it any less thrilling. Our will to believe, as consumers of art, is so strong that we continue to hover in a delicious semi-believing state.

> A highly immersive game must also convince the player that they really matter to the gameworld. Their choices must have effects

This kind of thing is often called postmodernism, but it has been around a lot longer than that. Shakespeare, for one, was very fond of staging audiences watching plays within his own plays, and using characters (often clowns) to comment ironically on their own status as fictional characters. It seems that an artform needs to attain a certain level of maturity in order to have the confidence to start pulling such tricks, and so the example of *Metal Gear Solid*'s wry jokes about being a videogame – the advice to switch joypad ports to avoid Psycho Mantis's unerring aim, and its sarcastic comments on how often you save – is encouraging.

Such playfulness should be cherished for two reasons. Partly because it reminds us that videogame narrative does not have to be stuck in a neutral, declamatory 19th-century style. And partly because it represents a fruitful reversal of direction in the psychological relationship between player and gameworld. Traditional tools of immersivity work to draw the player into the virtual space, but counter-immersivity draws the artwork outside its frame, and takes it into the same space as the viewer.

The use of hardware peripherals in videogames, of course, invokes a simple, mechanical counter-immersivity, the twin screens and sniper rifle of coin-op *Silent Scope* being a prime example. But, as when the world of *Metal Gear Solid* temporarily leaks out of the screen, counter-immersivity can also take more subtle, structural paths. The cleverest design aspect of *Shadow Of Memories* is its hint of counter-immersivity in the way it weaves the familiar repeated-death videogame cliché so carefully into its narrative framework. And if EA's *Majestic* fulfils its promises, then counter-immersivity delivered through voicemail and email will add yet more this-world texture, as is already the case with the viral marketing campaign for Kubrick/Spielberg's 'AI'.

The most brutally disconcerting recent use of counter-immersivity in cinema occurs in Japanese horror film 'Ring'. More than any other film, it is designed to work its black magic when watched on video, alone, in a darkened room. I don't want to spoil it for you, but it can be seen to hint at a more cunningly manipulative future for electronic entertainment. Videogames may become ever more pleasurably or terrifyingly immersive if they can just learn to crawl out of our televisions more often.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life Of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com



AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Choosing a platform: like finding the right woman

As I'm sure many of you already know, Sega officially announced its commitment to Nintendo at E3, developing its new multi-platform strategy following similar announcements on the Sony and Microsoft consoles. I'm really excited, because as a creator, Nintendo is one of the companies I've always wanted to work with. In addition to that, Nintendo is quite a challenging partner. So the fact that it is now possible makes me very happy.

So, the first two companies from the Sega group to make the move to GameCube are Amusement Vision and Sonic Team. The first titles will be *Phantasy Star Online*, *Virtua Striker 3*, and *Monkey Ball*, all of which will benefit from GameCube's increased power. Anyway, enough of plugging Sega games, let's talk about E3.

To tell the truth, I have the impression the industry is getting confused, as it is in Japan, which is quite sad, actually. I really hoped we would see action and get some exciting surprises, but I feel that I have been quite naïve. Dreamcast has gone, and, in my opinion, Microsoft and Sony weren't able to present anything really innovative. What attracted my attention the most was certainly Nintendo, but I really should stress that it is not because I decided to work on GameCube that I'm flattering the company. I just think that, as always, the company has the right approach to the market. I also have the impression that this company is able to offer a solid line-up for a given market. As a result, people will desire these titles. In another way, even if the company chooses a young audience as a centre for its strategy, it is able to offer such a deep and rich content that it can also appeal to a much older audience. Yeah, they are good. Do I flatter them too much? Luigi was there, but there was no sign of Mario or Zelda for the launch of new hardware. Every new Nintendo console has given us the occasion to discover a new Mario, and I want to see what new innovations his reappearance will bring. With this in mind and a lot of excitement, I was a little disappointed to not see the game at the show. But even that didn't affect my favourable impression.

At the show, many people asked me whether our developing two titles for GameCube signalled a shift away from the arcades. Well, this is not the case at all, and I will continue the arcade business as well. It is obvious for me. To me, both markets have the same attraction: they are both interesting.

Anyway, as I have only just returned to Japan from E3, I'm still suffering from jetlag. I only stayed three days, but I feel exhausted. Interviews were the most exhausting thing – always the very same questions: "Why did you choose GameCube?", "What do you think about Game Cube now you are working on it?". I had to give the same answer over and over, and I felt very tired.

Anyway, to answer these two questions simply I would say: "Because I wanted to," and, "I don't see what would be wrong working on hardware developed by a company with such a prestigious history in the industry." While this may sound overly simplistic, I really can't see what more I can say on the subject. Okay, let's be a little vicious and let's say what people would like to hear: "Okay, this is great…" and at the same time, "but this is not good." However, I think that when you start to work on any hardware, if you start to find you are struggling with certain aspects of the platform, you should not mention it. There is a reason for that, in that I think it is a personal evaluation of a machine, and the fact is there is no perfect hardware.

If one person thinks a machine is perfect, there will always be another who disagrees. Indeed, I have a bizarre image in my mind that likens evaluating a console to searching for your 'type' of woman. Well, I told you it was bizarre. I mean, when a person thinks a woman is very attractive, that does not necessary mean everybody will think the same. In a simple way, this could mean looking at how the eyes and the nose are, or looking at the total package. Because the eyes are big or the nose a little low, then that would not make a woman beautiful for everybody – it is the overall impression she gives that will make her attractive. But that isn't always enough, and sometimes something more is needed. Something strong, which remains inside you. It is the very same thing for console. So, is a given piece of hardware offering this good total balance or not? This is the point, I think. As creators have very different tastes, their respective types of woman – their perfect hardware – differs.

In this sense, GameCube, PlayStation2 and XBox may may be considered as many different types of woman. What do you think? Thinking that way may sound funny. And I would add… no, let's stop there. This should be a talk about hardware and it is getting very, um, 'hot'. So, yes, a system would be attractive if it managed to have this good total balance and an unidentifiable vital plus. So, if hardware is the body, software would be the perfume or the clothes. Casual, suit, dress, and then the right make-up to fit with them – I really think the creator is this stylist, who will give this attractive allure to a model. Yes, that sounds great.

Among developers working on certain hardware, there will always be one saying: "No, that's it. I can't continue," and will strongly express its dissatisfaction. According to my analogy, it would be rude to say to a woman who may not be your type: "Why are you not different?" If she is not your type, she may well be ideal for many other people. The angry developer would be hated by the girl. So, it is important to choose according to your taste (select a platform), get a date (development), and bingo (a hit game). That's it. Saying such things reminds me I really found Dreamcast very attractive and, well, we broke up. Wait a minute, I've gone and strayed back to my analogy. Oh well, see you again.

I only stayed for three days at E3 but I am now exhausted. The interviewers always asked the same thing: "Why GameCube?"

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

Edge's most wanted

Freak Out
Imagine the *Mario 64* title screen crossed with the cutest rubber-band fight ever, then stretch it into an essay on the evils of exaggerated beauty. Stunning.



(PS2) Virgin

Jet Set Radio Future
Possibly the most stylish title displayed on the XBox stand, this latest version of Smilebit's visually revolutionary creation should impress all upon release.



(XBox) Sega

Stuntman
Any game that lets you recreate James Bond's infamous corkscrew river jump (minus overweight sheriff in the passenger seat) has to bode well.



(PS2) Infogrames

Max Payne
Ignore the poor trailer – this was one of the most promising E3 games. Rumours about it becoming an XBox exclusive were rife. If not, it's out in one month.



(PC/PS2) Take 2

Super excited yet?

How to smile while cutting your teeth

Hit a nail with an inflatable hammer enough times and maybe, just maybe, the nail will eventually sink into wood. **Robbie Bach**, chief XBox officer, may have been hoping for a similar effect when he came on to the stage at the Los Angeles Entertainment Centre to give everyone a taste of console gaming, Microsoft-style. "I'm super excited," he declared. And as if we weren't already convinced about the power of XBox, he proceeded to repeat a corruption of this phrase after every two statements.

But not everything worked with the reliability of a talking doll's voice-cord at the XBox conference. Video links went down, games displayed serious frame-rate issues, and respected Japanese developers stood awkwardly on the stage failing to hide their embarrassment behind thick sunglasses. It was an opening to Microsoft's E3 which highlighted its inexperience in the console market.

Elsewhere, Nintendo and Sony demo'd games with an assured touch. In truth, their line-ups contained the same mixture of bad, indifferent and intriguing titles. Even *Luigi's Mansion* (below) failed to completely convince, with the comment 'limited' summing up the experience for many attendees. But in terms of presentation and media savvy, the two Japanese rivals have been doing this for too long to get it completely wrong. Sony's introduction of hired 'clappers' to their press conference filled the astute with dread, but gave the less perceptive a more favourable impression of a mixed bag of announcements.

Technical glitches hardly helped Microsoft, but the order in which it showcased its games showed greater naivete. Potential blockbusters *Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee* and *Halo* opened the event; the risible *Pirates Of Skullcove* and a unimpressive demo of *AI* followed; a multiplayer demo of *NASCAR Heat* (which only underlined the demonstrator's poor driving skills) rounded things off. Predictably, journalists eager for melodramatic news went away with only the insipid, half-complete titles fresh in their minds.

XBox has potentially great games, but the Microsoft image problem remains. Broad smiles and 'skatin' krew' slang will have even less credence away from US shores. Europe and Japan will require more subtle marketing approaches. But for the meantime, expect to be bombarded by the terms 'rad', 'bombed', and 'jazzed', and a good deal more leading up to the US XBox launch in November.











Luigi's Mansion

Luigi beats his brother to GameCube as Nintendo offers an intriguing glimpse of the sort of environments that will be making an appearance on its shiniest console





Though this is a dark game by Nintendo's standards (have you ever seen Luigi looking like this?); it's all wrapped up in the cuteness so beloved of the softco





This oddbod (top left) assists Luigi with his adventure, providing a machine into which captured ghosts can be fed. In a clever Nintendo touch, a Game Boy Color provides in-game assistance (above)

The storyline is typically twee: Luigi has won a mansion in a competition and his brother has gone ahead of him to have a look at his prize. When the lesser-known brother turns up, however, Mario is nowhere to be seen. Here begins a game which in high-concept terms would be described as '*Atic Atac* meets 'Ghostbusters''.

Rather than being a platform game in the *Mario 64* mould, *Luigi's Mansion* offers a much more feet-on-the-ground experience. In place of knife-edge jumping precision comes pure exploration: it's your task to clear every room of Luigi's new abode from the ghost-like occupants now calling it home. This is achieved via collaborative use of torch and vacuum cleaner: the aforementioned shocks spooks into freezing whereupon they can be safely sucked into the latter.

What sounds like a straightforward gameplay mechanic is initially confounded by the distinctive GameCube joypad – the yellow camera stick actually moves Luigi, while the analogue stick directs his torch and vac, which are brought into play via the R button. It takes a little while to get your fingers around this setup (indeed, some E3-goers struggled for what seemed like hours), but eventually, as with most Nintendo games, controlling the action gets close to becoming second nature.

As a showcase for what this 128bit hardware can do, *Luigi's Mansion* does not

In place of knife-edge jumping precision comes pure exploration: it's your task to clear every room of Luigi's new abode of ghosts



Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4 (Japan) TBC (UK)**







The player walks the line between confronting ghosts and being spooked by them – producing comic effects

put forward a case for mega-poly-count environments, preferring instead to populate the dwelling with a relatively meagre amount of furniture against texture-rich backdrops. But every foreground component is rendered with a somehow magical sense of solidity, immediately giving GameCube a 'feel' that is wholly unlike PlayStation2's, for example.

Much was made of the game's lighting effects prior to E3, and in this respect it delivered, Luigi's torch dancing across objects as it illuminated environments in an *Alone In The Dark: The New Nightmare* manner. Particle effects were similarly effective, with specks of dust and Luigi's warm breath visible through the torch beam.

In truth, Nintendo's biggest GameCube title at E3 failed to live up to the expectations of those who witnessed it – chiefly because those expectations were so stupidly stellar. It must be said that this is a more pedestrian experience than most Mario/Luigi games, and those waiting for Nintendo's platform-game return have some time to sit out.







In terms of how the game is negotiated, think more *Paper Mario* than *Mario 64*. Entering new areas sees walls and doors taking on a translucent quality (above left). Some of the larger foes take longer to suck into your household cleaning device (left). Numbers indicate their 'health'

Freak Out

Thirteen beautiful sisters, a similarly unlucky number of evil demons, and a scarf that's possessed – welcome to the continually odd world of Treasure







Boss levels following on from 'normal' stages may not be particularly revolutionary, but trust Treasure to have come up with some memorable attack patterns



The superb central hub chamber where access to the game world is granted. Once all levels are defeated, a further stage would appear to exist

If you read **E**96's 'Inside… Treasure' feature, you'll know *Freak Out* is one of three projects currently sucking the remarkable (and seemingly) never-ending abundance of originality out of the small but tremendously respected Tokyo-based company. And if you visited **Edge**'s online forum several weeks ago, you would have seen screenshots along with a brief outline of the plot. **Edge** has since played a preview disc, and can now share more.

For the less devoted forum frequenters (or indeed, those without Internet access), the narrative is deliciously Treasure-like: the 13 most beautiful sisters on the planet are targeted by the 13 demons of vanity who like nothing better than to transform human beings into freakishly mutated versions of physical loveliness. Of course, to do just that the last of malignant spirits slip up and end up possessing the 13th sister's scarf instead. Realising she can tame the evil length of material in question (which has the power to deform anything it touches), Linda then sets about rescuing her possessed siblings.

How you use your scarf's ability is entirely up to you – and this is a concept that, to Edge's mind, borders on videogaming genius

But, of course, there's a superbly stylised intro to tell you all this without the need for words. Then 'start' is pressed and the screen reawakens to display the most memorable central chamber of an otherwise familiar and reasonably generic hub-like arrangement. The walls, the floor – everything in the world – are depicted in the suitably crazed pencil art seen some years ago in A-ha's 'Take On Me' video. Everything, that is, except Linda, her colourful depiction standing audaciously at odds with the stark, though lively, monochromatic environment. An appropriate time to get to grips with the controls, then.

The left Dual Shock stick moves the lucky lady. The righthand side equivalent aims the demonic scarf. L1 locks on to baddies with strafing ability enabled, L2 allows you to look around, while R1 unleashes the possessed garment dangling from your neck. Looking for the jump button? You're wasting your time. If leaping is your thing (and it'll have to be if you want to complete some of the levels), you're going to have to grab the environment and propel yourself against gravity.

The clutching part is done automatically, with your angry scarf ever eager to wrap its cloth fingers around whatever comes within reach. When it does find something it likes the feel of – say, a foe – it takes hold, and pulling back on the right analogue stick stretches that particular antagonist until you're ready to let go of the R1 button. Obviously, the more you pull back, the harder the hit, with the most powerful blow requiring a little circular wiggling of the analogue stick to build up the tension meter until Linda herself is thrust against the assailant.

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Virgin**
Developer: **Treasure**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q3 (UK)**





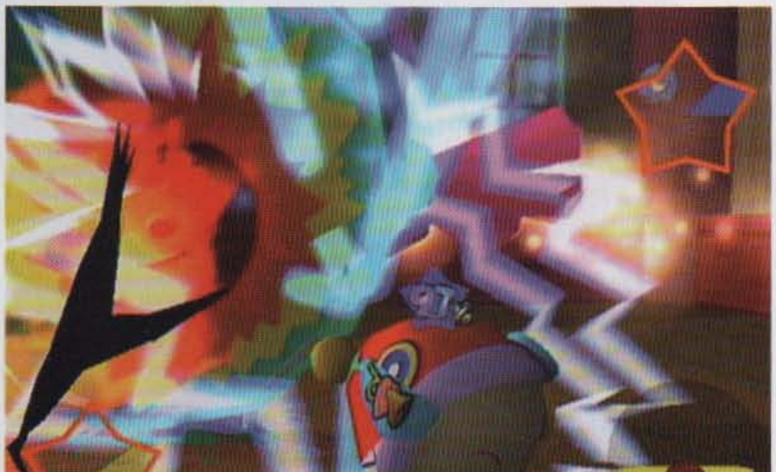


One of your possessed sisters (above). The star-shaped icons at the bottom left and top right of the display are your and the enemy's health, respectively. The scarf's tension gauge can be seen on the bottom right









The game is nearing completion and due out in Japan soon. **Edge**'s only worry at this stage is the pronounced level of slowdown that can occasionally crop up during the game's more hectic moments

The ingenious element, however, is that any part of the scenery can be manipulated in the same manner, which is how you go about getting airborne. It takes a little getting used to, particularly in terms of judging the direction and strength correctly, but it does work.

And before you realise it, you're playing with an entirely novel set of play mechanics. You're stretching enemies' body parts and using these as weapons, deforming your surroundings in order to protect yourself against hostile projectiles, or thrusting yourself across gaps using nothing other than two analogue sticks and a few shoulder buttons. How you use your scarf's ability is entirely up to you – and this is a concept which, to **Edge**'s mind at least, is one that borders on videogaming genius.

Less revolutionary is the game's structure, with boss levels following 'normal' stages, but as with all of Treasure's output, you can at least expect the unexpected when it comes to the characters you're up against. Whoever decided that the beach-ball-sized breasts of the first-level female opponents should double up as helicopter-style rotors should get a promotion. No, make that two.

Expect a review soon.

Wave Race: Blue Storm

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-house (US)**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4**

The halls of E3 played host to all manner of watersports titles, but it did not take long for word to get around that Nintendo's seminal jetski game was back in town...



One of Nintendo's surprise E3 showings was this, an update of the five-year-old jetskiing game which many still regard as the pinnacle of the N64's malnourished racing catalogue, developed by the Nintendo-owned American outfit which succeeded in bring *Ridge Racer* so convincingly to the N64.

The most obvious improvement in 128bit mode is the appearance of seven opponents, compared to the three of the 64bit version. (Weren't gamers forgiving way back then?) In a purely visual sense, however, the game initially fails to offer inspiration, its push towards realism offering a style of presentation almost akin to a PC game: it looks slightly drab in comparison to the colour-drenched, almost cartoony N64 title.

Nor does the game appear to push nearly as many polys as its host machine is capable of. The trade-off comes in the form of spot visual effects: light bounces off jetskis and the water's surface, itself rendered in a staggeringly organic manner (indeed, realistic-looking water was all over E3, and only two titles came close to matching *Blue Storm*'s H_2O – *Pirates Of Skullcove Island* and Interplay's *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*), and the camera 'lens' becomes spattered with spray during replay sequences, an effect somewhat akin to that of *Wargasm*, but more convincingly implemented.



The somewhat sombre tones of this sequel sit at odds with the legendary N64 title. In an odd move, some of the characters' spark has been stifled

Nintendo promises a total of around a dozen tracks for the finished game, although at least three are being directly brought over from the previous game, lending a familiar feel. Most tracks offer the typical brand of *Wave Race* short cuts and obstacles, and, unsurprisingly, buoys mark out your route through each. As in the previous game, passing these markers eventually maxes out your power, but *Blue Storm* also introduces a turbo feature, which becomes available before full power is achieved. This element brings with it a new layer of strategy as players elect to use speed bursts for overtaking manoeuvres or to simply gain extra distance when jumping over obstacles.

Unquestionably the most enjoyable watersports title at E3, Nintendo's game also allows you to perform a wide selection of stunt-like moves while riding, some familiar to the series, others new. As well as being aesthetically rewarding, such stunts bring score remuneration.

While in some respects it was disappointing to see Nintendo hauling across so many established aspects to this high-profile GameCube title, it proved one of E3's biggest draws, and served to hammer home the message that many gamers seek little more than updates of properties they know and love.



It was difficult to tell on the monitors at E3, but *Blue Storm* appears to use a lower resolution than most other GameCube titles. The trade-off comes in the form of a raft of truly magnificent water manipulation



TimeSplitters 2

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Free Radical Design**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q2 2002**

Free Radical goes back to the future once more (or is it the past?), pouring extra effort into refining the oneplayer element of its runaway success of an FPS

TimeSplitters may have offered a shallow oneplayer experience, but it still proves to be one of the best multiplayer games on any console. Those still engaged in the Challenge mode, the multiplayer arenas or just tinkering around with the MapMaker will be delighted to hear that the sequel is to receive enhancements in every department.

Much of the engine code will remain intact, but the team is keen to make major upgrades in key areas. Apart from visual enhancements, environments will be more expansive and include many interactive components. Settings will include the Wild West of the 1850s, contemporary spy locations, and futuristic planet landscapes. The time-travelling theme will also ensure that many of the original characters return. The developer promises a new animation system to make enemy characters act more dynamically to wounds in key hit areas, and all weapons will be enhanced. But, more importantly, puzzle-based objectives are to make an appearance in the oneplayer game. The team behind *GoldenEye* will hopefully be looking to put a little bit of inspiration into the FPS, which is overtaking the driving game as the most popular form of e-entertainment.

Multiplayer aspects are to be as manic as before, but will also benefit from more intricate level designs and an improved version of the MapMaker. Few details about these aspects are being revealed, but i-Link support is assured and a possible online component is under discussion. Screenshots hint at FPS squad-based combat, which may be the first of its kind on console. Coding began on the title in November and it is scheduled for a spring 2002 release.









Character models are already much improved from the original, and a rewritten animation system should ensure that the death sequences are more convincing. Though the manic nature of the multiplayer games will remain, the team has made a commitment to the oneplayer experience. More complex mission objectives and a cohesive plot will send the player from the Wild West to alien landscapes on a quest to thwart the TimeSplitters





Unreal 2

Legend Entertainment invites Edge into the all-new, hugely expansive *Unreal* universe to talk engine advances, fluid NPC interaction, and the oneplayer experience. But whatever you do, don't mention the multiplayer...

The interview with Legend Entertainment is going smoothly – but the atmosphere is about to change. A seemingly innocent question about the game's deathmatch options has the team looking at their shoelaces in an awkward silence. You would think the team currently working with Epic's powerful new *Unreal 2* engine would be delighted to talk about the game's multiplayer aspects. But silence hangs in the air until Legend's studio head, **Mike Verdu**, speaks up: "A lot of play has been given to this product's multiplay in the press, but we want to talk about other aspects too. The focus for most users is going to be the oneplayer game. Let's talk about that."

If Legend Entertainment wants to get one message across today, it is this: *Unreal 2* will be bigger and better than anything its licensor has produced to date. It comes across in everything the team says. "*Unreal* was a linear quest through a somewhat barren landscape," declares Verdu. He is clearly unperturbed by the presence of the Epic team, which is also in attendance at the meeting. Legend may be contracted to the hugely successful Epic, but it certainly isn't intimidated by its reputation.



Aida is the military intelligence officer who will guide the player on strategy and deliver many of the plot twists from the confines of the Atlantis



A pinch of assault

Anyone familiar with *Unreal Tournament*'s most dynamic element should be instantly enthused by the scope of Legend's design brief. The team is taking the seeds of *Unreal Tournament*'s Assault mode and developing a game that will see the player defending and assailing fortresses on a massive scale. This will involve firefights against alien



Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Legend Entertainment**
Release: Spring **2002**
Origin: **US**



Legend is particularly proud of its particle system, which is its own addition to the *Unreal 2* engine. Along with impressive flame and smoke effects, the team promises material effects which will bend and flow to convey the sense of air flowing around the interior and exterior environments

landscapes, the defence of the allied citadels, and the infiltration of underwater strongholds. Layers of sophistication will then be bolted on in terms of gadgetry and squad-based combat.

Verdu outlines his vision: "You have the assault flavour because not only do you have multiple attackers coming in, but you also have multiple defenders in a very fast-paced battle. You are taking part in the battle and co-ordinating, so

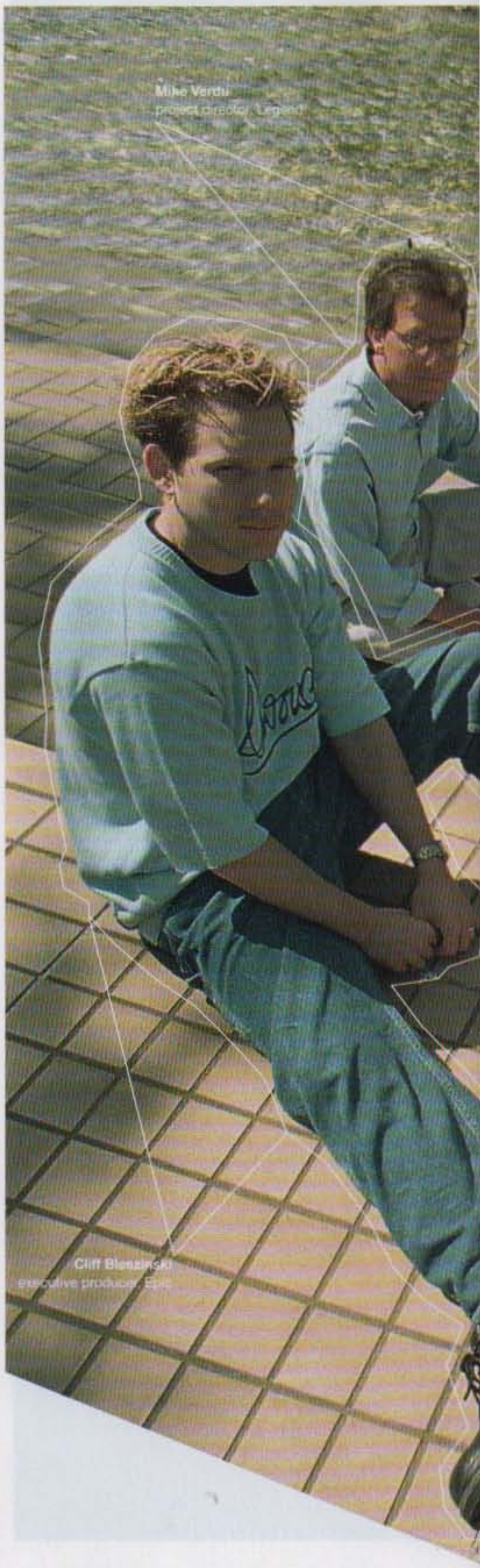
Legion's reluctance to discuss multiplayer becomes clear. Talk of frag counts and capturing flags does a disservice to the effort which is being channelled into the oneplayer game

the experience should be very intense. This will have a natural intermission, so the first wave finishes and things calm down. Defenders can then run to the first-aid stations, get healed and get ammo. Then you will get notification that the second wave is on its way."

The reasoning behind Legend's initial reluctance to discuss all things multiplayer now becomes clear. Talk of frag counts and capturing flags does a disservice to the effort which is being channelled into the oneplayer game. As a 24th century marshal at the frontier of space, it is the player's task to recover three powerful artefacts and quell an interstellar conflict between six alien races. Each mission reveals a little more of the plot, but the team has ambitions to give the player freedom over forming allegiances. "In one battle you may be allied with a particular mercenary company, and then two missions later you will be fighting them," explains Verdu. "The balance of power shifts continuously and in some cases we will let you make these choices dynamically. It's really an objective of ours to have you go down into a battle, see two sides fighting and pick one. We will eventually channel you back into the story, because you don't want it getting out of control, but we want it to be as open ended as possible."

Discovering Atlantis

A meta narrative will support the plot, which unravels during missions. This takes the form of discussions between major characters on the Atlantis, the crew's military ship. You will be able to explore the ship, research items found






Mark Poesch
Grant Roberts
associate producer, Legend
Scott Dalton
Jack Porter

New world order



The latest iteration of the Unreal engine (Unreal 2) provides Legend with the grunt behind its game universe. While the original *Unreal* was optimised for Intel's MMX technology along with PowerVR and 3dfx 3D accelerators, the engine's advantage lies in the consolidation of core technology. NVidia's dominance in the videocard market is seen as a boon by Epic. "Diversity held back 3D," says **Tim Sweeney**, Epic's lead programmer. "Now NVidia is doing everything possible to accommodate gamers, and we're already talking to Microsoft about DirectX 9. Up to now all 3D games have looked similar because of the hardware. Now they'll start to look more unique."

The *Unreal 2* landscapes revealed to **Edge** along with the technology demos shown at GDC provide ample proof of *Unreal 2*'s power and versatility. The ability to move smoothly from an expansive outdoor arena to a claustrophobic interior, with no drop in performance or detail, is the engine's greatest asset. The landscapes Legend has generated for *Unreal 2* are already some of the most memorable and haunting consigned to silicon. It is DirectX 8.0's manipulation of both pixel and vertex shaders which has given artists the versatility to truly realise their imaginations.

Though polygon counts alone cannot improve gameplay, the ability to provide solid and well-realised environments is seen by Epic as a step forward in terms of player immersion. *Unreal 2* can comfortably generate 50,000 triangles per frame and remain at a constant 60fps. To put this into perspective, *Unreal* ran at around 300 triangles per frame. "Levels run fine on XBox dev kits – both hardware transformed and hardware lit," states Epic lead programmer **Jack Porter**. "It's based around some of the old *Unreal* code, but we've added some new sets of core functionality to bring it up to speed. There are two main additions: the terrain system for large outdoor areas, and the static measures, or hardware pressures. These are high-poly-count, prefabricated objects that you can place around a level."

Epic's new engine promises to bring an incredible level of power and versatility to coders at all levels with large libraries and resources already under construction. Though Epic is busy developing a new title for XBox, it seems certain that the licensing of its new engine could generate more dollars than any one hit game.



More than 24 enemy creatures will make the final game. The Skaarj is the only race to return from the original, though new tribe types – indicated by tattoos (right) – will provide different challenges. More fearsome leaders will command their brethren







during missions to build new weapons, and exchange information with key characters. For Legend this is no mere gimmick, but a core part of the gameplay. "We think it is unique," enthuses Legend's technical lead, **Mark Poesch**. "In the firstperson genre I've always been troubled when you go into dialogue mode you get these characters with idle animations and the player is locked into this sort of altered state. There will be a limited number of characters that you will get to know well, and they have personalities – an emotional state relative to the player. They will get pissed off at you if you abuse them, and they'll make jokes with you if you make jokes with them."

In essence, the player can walk up to a crewmember on the Atlantis and enter the dialogue mode by pressing the use key. A list of short 'talk' options will be listed. Through this type of interfacing is nothing new, Legend wants to make conversations incredibly fluid. Characters will become impatient if there are long pauses, and the system will invite players to interrupt others or draw third parties into the chatter. "What drives our motivation is that we have a system and every player will try to break the system," adds Poesch. "The trick is to do the things which are worth doing versus things which are just a waste of time. Imagine the player jumping up and down. What is the character going to say about this? There's potential for them to get increasingly disturbed. Eventually it could raise the possibility of the player being put under medical supervision and then game over."

Three major characters will give guidance to the player: Ne'Ban, a 'kick-ass' pilot, Isaak, the ship's technology expert, and Aida, a beautiful intelligence officer. "It is really Aida who sets things up for you," explains Verdu. "She knows what's going on in the sector and will be in contact with you when you go planet-side." The team is currently considering the possibilities of these crewmembers accompanying you on missions. "We don't want a *Daikatana* situation," says Verdu. "We believe in player empathy, so we're not going to let you screw yourself. Marines will provide you with enough firepower to complete a mission. We want to give them enough personality so they have names and different voices, but when Johnson buys it at the front entrance you feel a pain, but that's life."

Unreal ambition

The scope of *Unreal 2* is terrifying. The game will combine elements of traditional corridor FPS tension with squad-based assault play. But Verdu is aware of the difficulties involved. Though the oneplayer experience will remain the focus, only 13 missions are provided.

The team is keen to make each combat arena unique. Each will have a very different objective, some relying on strategically organising your forces, others focusing on infiltration and





Though Legend is developing *Unreal 2* for Epic Games, it has ambitions to make this new installment superior to the original in every way. The oneplayer game remains the focus



discovery. "On one level you come to a mysterious dig site," adds Verdu. "You drop down and discover architecture that you've never seen before. As you explore further there is a door blocking your path and there will be a path about how to get around it. It isn't an adventure game but we want to provide puzzles that aren't just pulling switches."

Enabling the player to orchestrate crew members effectively will be Legend's sternest test. Verdu wants to keep allied forces down to ten on any given mission. This could still cause problems, though short-cut commands will hopefully help matters. "The way you would issue orders to somebody is to run up and press our use key," explains Verdu. "You can initiate a conversation with them and you would get a set of options that include defend a tower, go out front, or follow me. You

The team has divided weapons into five types: biological, electric, psychic, thermal, and physical. Matching them with the alien encountered will be a major part of the strategy

could go to an area you want to guard and say defend this area. At the beginning of a defence mission if you want to position guys in different places, you could give them the short-cut orders or lead them to where you wanted to defend. You will also be able to set up turret guns and force fields and actual objects that influence gameplay. Those you can drop into an environment and activate."

The arms race

While gadgetry is becoming a more important part of the modern FPS, the weapons included in *Unreal 2* are an intriguing proposition. Five damage types exists: biological, electric, psychic, thermal, and physical. Matching the appropriate weapon to the alien encountered will be a major part of the game strategy. The grenade launcher, for instance, will be capable of using many different types of round, from smoke to stasis grenades. The latter can be timed to detonate and will create a temporary distortion field where everything slows down. The Takkra Gun (which fires hunter/killer drones) and the Leech gun (a biological weapon shooting swarms of flesh-eating creatures) also give some indication of









the weaponry Legend is attempting to introduce to the FPS.

Unreal 2 is such a departure from the original game that only one race is to make the transition to the sequel – the Skaarj. The landscape technology has provided Legend with certain design challenges. Create a surreal landscape and suitably unusual alien types are required to populate them. Perhaps the strangest are the Striders – biological terrors that grow in strength through melding with other Striders. Beginning as a blob of conical glue, the Strider, if left to its own devises, will eventually form the Strider Nemesis – a creature with dramatically increased firepower and intelligence. Striders will also be able to disassemble and reassemble to overcome obstacles while hunting down adversaries.

More unusual still are the 'N' – a transdimensional alien race. "There are actually only three N," points out Verdu. "But because they occupy more than one position in space at a time there appears to be hundreds of thousands of them. They can't be killed, but when you shoot one, the blast depletes the energy used to fold space and time at that particular node of the N." While Trekkers may love the possibility such creatures conjure up, **Edge** only hopes that Legend avoids the usual features associated with such videogames entities: a series of fluorescent clouds designed to frustrate.

Multiplayer made clear

As for the multiplayer options, after explaining every facet of the oneplayer game, Legend becomes more amiable to talking about online play. "There is a lot of multiplayer action too," concludes Verdu. "You have a home base which you can customise with gun turrets, forcefields and sensors. Then you have to attack your opponent's home base

The promise of indoor and outdoor environments, combined with Legend's own advanced particle technology, promises truly frantic multiplayer skirmishes











The power and flexibility of the *Unreal 2* engine is such that levels can be designed with more speed and ingenuity. Vast underwater environments will be encountered

and bring back a precious item. The little twist that we've added is that your base has a machine that peruses all the machines and gadgets. It has a research tree which is class based. There is a particular class that can control the research tree. It will start with replicators, and then work up over time until you're producing rocket launchers and scout robots. This should change the dynamic of gameplay, and give an almost RTS aspect to the experience."

The promise of indoor and outdoor environments (see 'New world order'), combined with Legend's own advanced particle technology, promises truly frantic multiplayer skirmishes. Smoke grenades can be fired to create diversions or cover allied advances. While smaller weapons can be manufactured quickly, powerful technology, such as repair robots, will take longer. Teams must decide whether to go for an all-out assault on the enemy, or bide their time researching technology and creating defence shields.

It is admirable that Legend is looking further than typical deathmatch arenas to provide gamers with something special, but in truth too much of *Unreal 2* is currently wrapped in design documentation and concept art for any real appraisal to be made of its potential. Legend talks a good game, but there is little on show which adequately conveys the team's own excitement for the game. "The countdown timer reaches zero," enthuses Verdu at one point. "We go to a cutscene where you see dropships land on terrain outside the base. Marines jump out and form into squads. You hear your guys screaming and chattering on the radio. I see an enemy coming around the front wall, I see an enemy coming around the back. All hell is about to break loose."

Unreal 2 is certainly one of the most ambitious FPS games ever envisaged. Unfortunately, it may take until next year's E3 to discover if Verdu's vision is to become a videogame masterpiece.





Legend promises ten unique settings ranging from volcanic planets to heavily forested landscapes. Players will be able to move from interior to exterior environments with no drop in detail





Photography: **Martin Thompson**

Inside…

Revolution

Stung by the reception of its last title, *In Cold Blood*, the York-based codeshop has regrouped, rethought, and – to some extent – returned to its roots for its new assault on the market. Edge plays detective to find out more about *Good Cop Bad Cop* and the next in the legendary *Broken Sword* series

History is everywhere. Inside the walled city of York, outside Revolution's York office, it's 11am and a beautiful day. As progress is made down a steep stone path by the river Ouse, sun shining overhead, tourist boats drifting by, **Edge**'s first thought is: if this is a revolution, then it's a pretty relaxed one. But you wouldn't expect anything else from a software house based here. York is all about tradition over change, whispered dungeon stories and franchised mistakes and regrets, marketable ghosts in the photograph. Revolution loves its memories, too.

Charles Cecil leads the way through the Revolution offices. Pieces of memorabilia adorn the walls – a *Broken Sword* poster here, some *Lure Of The Temptress* publicity over there – proud history, past achievements. **Edge** is here to see the future of Revolution – *Good Cop Bad Cop* – and glimpse work on its new *Broken Sword* title. Cecil wanders off and returns with colleagues **Ben McCullough** and **John Payne**, and three folders, which turn out to be the equivalent of Revolution's Domesday books. Each one is full of press clippings for their back catalogue, a history thick with praise. He flicks through them with a smile. Happy memories.

Vive la Revolution

It's 1992, and Revolution releases its first game, *Lure Of The Temptress*. The title combines old-world ethics with graphical adventure, and goes straight to number one in the sales charts. The developer's second title, the snapped futurism of *Beneath A Steel Sky*, is released in 1994, and follows the path of success carved by the first. The two chapters of the *Broken Sword* trilogy come next, and stun adventurers worldwide. By 1997, Revolution's branding is synonymous with the brilliantly worked Templar tales. Then comes *In Cold Blood*. Cecil's expression changes, and he looks down at the press cuttings: "*In Cold*

On top of the *RenderWare* toolset, Revolution has added volumetric lighting, particle effects, and animated textures. One area of pride is the explosions: "Pretty much the whole screen, exploding in your face," says Payne















Revolution devotees will recognise this alley scene from *Broken Sword 2*. To demonstrate the look they're aiming for in *The Sleeping Dragon*, Revolution resketched and reconstructed it

Blood... people who loved adventures and liked action gave us fantastic reviews. People who liked adventures and didn't like action would give us slightly lower marks. People..."

His voice trails off, but you just know what he's thinking. He clarifies: "It was sold, mistakenly – and God knows who by – as a *Metal Gear Solid* equivalent. So people thought 'excellent', and then it was nothing like *MGS* whatsoever. *In Cold Blood* was an adventure, and it was an interesting experiment, and a lot of people loved it, and we don't intend to repeat it at all. *Good Cop Bad Cop* is an action game. The action determines everything."

Good Cop Bad Cop is one of two next-generation games Revolution is working on, in addition to converting the *Broken Sword* games to portable platforms. The other – the next in the *Broken Sword* series, *The Sleeping Dragon*, and absolutely not to be called *Broken Sword 3* – is just out of the planning stage. *Good Cop Bad Cop*, first seen in **E**98, is much more advanced.

Good Cop Bad Cop

Cecil introduces the thirdperson adventure: "It's an action game in which the narrative rewards you. It presents you with moral choices at certain points in the game, and the outcomes of those moral choices are very important. So you might have the option to shoot someone or arrest them, and the weapons you get, and the gadgets you get, depends on that choice. We want a consistent world, we want people to react according to their approach."

> "The narrative presents you with moral choices at certain points, and the outcomes of those choices are very important"

As revealed in **E**98, the game centres on detective Ben Kellman and his quest for justice for his murdered father. Accompanying Kellman is Maria, his honest, do-good partner, and McNab, the streetwise boss who encourages the detective to get the job done regardless of bodycount. The two influences act as devil and angel on Kellman's heavily burdened shoulders, giving advice and framing the game's moral choices. It's an interesting dynamic, especially given that this is Revolution's first self-sustained attempt at action gaming, but the director's eager to







The lead character has several different animations for pulling himself up differing heights of obstacles. It's just part of the animated attention to detail that Revolution hopes will elevate *Good Cop Bad Cop* above rivals' work





stress that the team knows what it's doing: "It's different. With an adventure, you can rely on story because you know what the gameplay is. With action games, the game is the gameplay."

Sometimes Cecil talks like a politician, punctuating short sentences with repeated bullet-point philosophy – "We have a very strong vision of what we want to achieve" – but sometimes cracks appear, and it's obvious he cares so much that you'd trust him with the future. He has unshakeable confidence in his team's ability, its collective vision.

While McCullough demonstrates the impressively reactive control system, which offers completely analogue control for almost every aspect of the character's movement, Cecil explains how that vision fits together: "The first part is the gunplay, the combat. It's based on the AI and the different characters, and the gameplay comes from deciding how to combat that: guys with riot shields who you may have to get behind, guys with autoguns, guys with crowbars. But also, and this is what makes the game more 'coplike', there's the exploration. You can climb, shimmy, sidestep."

Alongside these non-linear tactical decisions lies the forking bipolar morality. Moments in the plot will throw up stark good/bad decisions, and it's up to the player to deal with them as they see fit.

"So, there's a miniboss," continues Cecil. "You fight with him, and then you get a cutscene, and he's down there and he's still hurling abuse at you. And Maria's saying: 'Go on, knock him out'. And McNab's saying: 'The guy's just gonna be let off. Just pop a...' And then you either get your gun out and you shoot him, or you go into unarmed combat. It's a gameplay choice, and that's important."

But how will the player know whether they've made the right choice? And how will they know if it's still possible to get the good cop ending? "That's the million-dollar question," teases Cecil. "How bad can you be and still redeem yourself? Our current thoughts

FAQ

Company name: Revolution
Founded: 1992
HQ: York
Number of employees: 24
Softography: *Lure of the Temptress* (Amiga, PC); *Beneath A Steel Sky* (Amiga, PC); *Broken Sword* (PC); *Broken Sword 2* (PC); *In Cold Blood* (PS, PC)
Projects in development: *Good Cop Bad Cop*; *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon*


Steve Ince
designer
Tony Warriner
lead programmer/co-founder
Ben McCullough
designer
John Payne
lead programmer
Francesco Iorio
head of technology
Steve Gallagher
CEO

are that you're probably going to have to be pretty good to get the good cop route. We sort of want to encourage people to play the bad cop route, and we want to encourage them to work out how they get the good cop route; to think about it more.

"We've written the story so that you don't really know what you should be doing or you shouldn't be doing. We hope that players'll be sitting there thinking about it, and then the next day on the way to work they'll be thinking 'What should I have done there?'"

Though at every juncture Cecil is keen to stress that the emphasis in *Good Cop Bad Cop* is on action, it shares much of the philosophy that runs through the Revolution back catalogue. Skipping through the digital sketches and taking in the characters' personalities, it strikes **Edge** that this is as close to moviemaking as gaming gets. The game isn't a wry slight at cop folklore, nor is it a one-joke riff on the *Good Cop Bad Cop* formula. This is every piece of copshow cliché, shot as film noir and played completely straight, wrapped over something Cecil believes games so often lack: emotional depth.

"We wanted rich characterisation," he stresses. "A lot of Japanese and American games have very one-dimensional characters. I'm not into knocking other people's games – there are several which are excellent – but you never really get drawn into the characters."

That's not the only advantage Cecil feels Revolution has over its rivals, either: "Something that we do – and we don't believe the Japanese and Americans do – is the attention to detail in the animation. There's a lot of love gone into it. I'd like to think that there's no one else writing an action game who's really tried this hard to get across the right feeling.

"There's a lot of obsession with photorealism at the moment, and our feeling is that photorealism's never going to look as good as a film. So you want to believe your characters, but our feeling here is we want something that looks realistic, but is stylised, timeless. Like in 'Seven', we really liked the fact that you didn't know whether it was set now or in the past. What we don't want to do is pick up the baggage of any particular time period. An example is the cars – we very deliberately went for a mix of the '50s and the modern. It's all part of the unique look."

Have they found their vision limited by the host machine's architecture? Payne answers: "Texture memory is always going to be a problem on PlayStation2, but you can actually upload a lot of textures per frame. So it's not really about texture memory so much as it was in the first generation of games. We're getting really good performance from it, even though we're quite texture intensive. We've always done really nice prerendered backgrounds before. From an art point of view, we're not going to make do with standard PC-like games where you don't get much in the way of textures."

Cecil interrupts: "There's a big difference between first and second generation. To be fair to these guys they didn't have dev kits, they didn't have support, they didn't have libraries. We really caught the wave in terms of Sony's dev support, the new-generation dev kits, and also *RenderWare*. That's fantastic, because that's what middleware's really about, to give us – we're a content company, or that's what we've always been – a level playing field."

Payne nods, and continues: "It's given us a lift, because you don't have to write silly code to put triangles on the screen. We've got that, we've got that for PS2, XBox, GameCube, and PC. We're allowing the VU coprocessors to do the graphics, and we're using the core for the AI. We're using *Maya* for our artists and our designers. When you're programming a game you can split it, almost, into what you see and hear, and what's going on in the background – the AI, the character movement, that sort of thing. We're very much at the moment focused on the internals of it. The control system is the big thing. And the AI is the other, um, big thing. If you can have two big things."

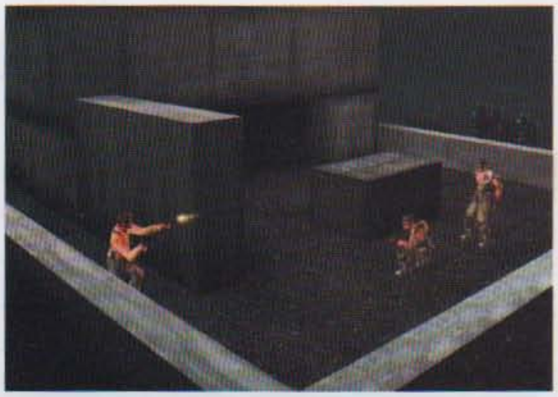
Broken Sword returns

If you can't, then Revolution's clearly in trouble across the board. Two big things: trying to develop a genre-defining artistic thirdperson shooter, while simultaneously scripting the follow-up to two of the greatest adventure games of all time. *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* is finally heading towards next-generation systems, and the adventure gaming community is in raptures, despite knowing little to nothing about it. Aside from concept art and the cover of a top-secret design document, Revolution has little to show today, but what *Edge* lays eyes on is exciting enough – conceptually at least. So why the long wait, especially given that demand for a third episode has always been so high?

"We consider it to be a valuable franchise," replies Cecil. "What terrifies us is ruining that. We want to keep it very much alive, rather than just pumping the franchise."

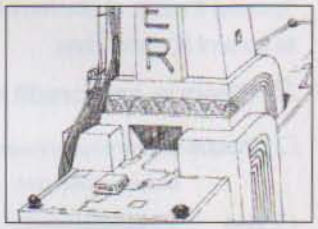
Valuable memories. The developer's last affair with marketing went wrong, so it's no wonder Revolution is precious about its past. *In Cold Blood* was judged as an ill-advised blend of two separate genres; by splitting them again, Revolution hopes to return to what it does best – excelling, storytelling, encoding more golden memories – with a small, albeit significant, switch in philosophy: "Previously it was the story that came first. Now it's the game."

So, Revolution goes back to telling tales, and mythology keeps on being written in York. Outside, the tourist buses rumble by. It's a gorgeous day. When you look back, it always seems that way.





Attacking the two gang members head on will lead to a firefight, but if the player finds a way around the side a little stealth killing is on the cards







Temporary textures and 3D level sketches are made into rooftops with some artistry





Best in show

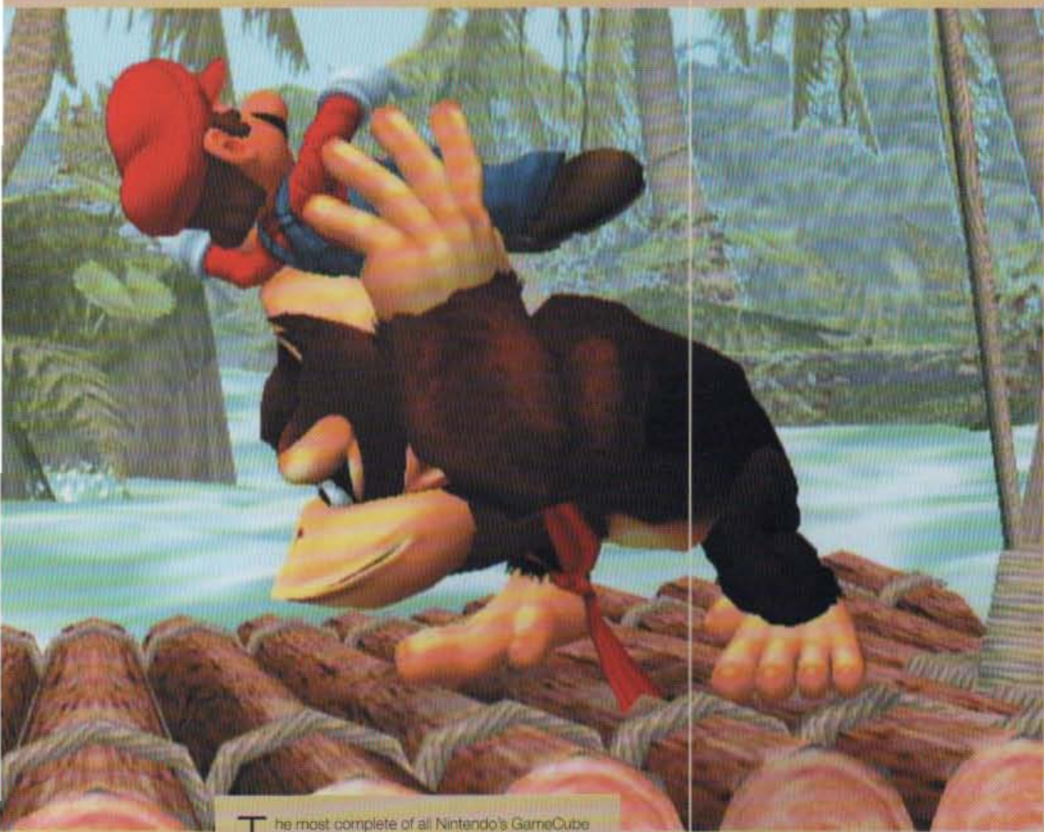
Edge dismisses the digital dogs being shown at the Electronic Entertainment Expo and brings you a look at the real contenders

According to its organisers, E3 2001 played host to 2,000 videogames. Just from the old 80:20 rule, you know that 1,600 of those would be eminently forgettable. And, being familiar with **Edge**, you know that paring the remainder down to a further subset isn't a difficult task. Over the next 22 pages, then, lie the most notable titles from the year's most important videogaming event.

If you looked hard enough, it was possible to identify a clutch of potential classics on every viable platform. However, some, more than others, appear to need more than simply an extra month's worth of testing before they can hope to make an impact. 'Best Of Show' will give you a clear picture of which upcoming software to keep tabs on. Some may never even see the light of day. Others will have their spark crushed by publisher pressure. But all succeeded in catching the eye of the discerning E3 attendee...


LET THE GAMES BEGIN
ECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EX

Super Smash Bros Melee



- Format: **GameCube**
- Publisher: **Nintendo**
- Developer: **HAL Labs**

The solidity of *Super Smash Bros Melee*'s manifold characters is patently clear. Nintendo has really pushed the boat out in exploiting its IP this time around, bringing Captain Falcon out of retirement and also exhuming the small, super-cute lead character from the ancient NES title, *Ice Climber*











The most complete of all Nintendo's GameCube titles at E3, *Super Smash Bros Melee* was one of the show's most played games. However, while some casual observers greeted its super-colourful, character-heavy action with open arms, hardened fans of the N64 incarnation seemed less impressed.

The most obvious difference relates to size: environments seem more cramped, while characters have grown. And this was the source of most criticism, players left slightly cold by the new scale.

In gameplay terms it's business as usual: up to four players choose from a selection of established Nintendo characters (including Mario, Link, Yoshi, Bowser, Captain Falcon, Donkey Kong, plus a number of secret faces) and take them into battle, simply attempting to knock each other from the platform upon which they stand.

Randomly generated power-ups put in an appearance (thrown from passing cars on the *F-Zero*-themed stage, for instance), and naturally each character has his or her own special moves.

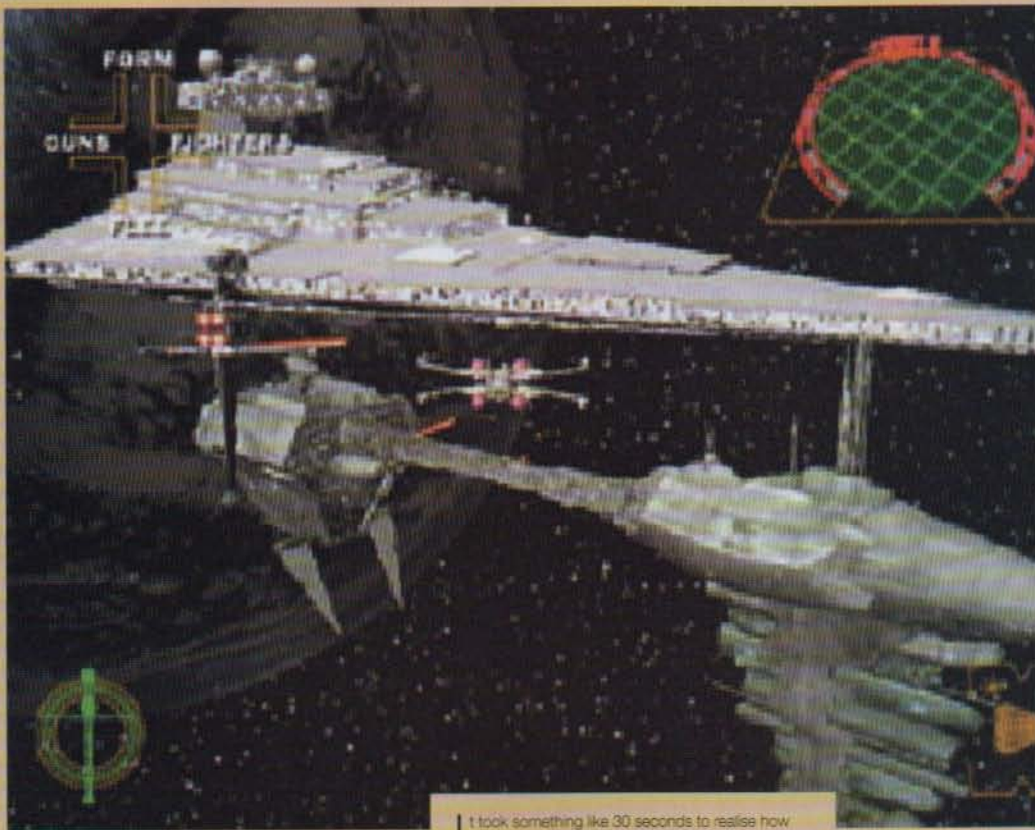
With backdrops essentially 'paintings', Nintendo has been able to lavish polygons on the characters themselves, and the effect is breathtaking, each recognisable figure appearing in the kind of detail previously associated with prerendered models.

Beyond the patently alluring graphics, Nintendo promises a Tournament mode allowing for up to 64 players to compete, various camera controls (which may combat the show version's perceived awkwardness), a saveable snapshot feature, and a number of mystery modes.

Ultimately, however, you can't help but wonder why Nintendo elected to make such a big deal out of *Super Smash Bros Melee* at E3. It's no coincidence that the company still has no big-name traditional beat 'em up in its fold, which may explain *Melee*'s prominence in the company's roster. By removing the purity of the original game, though, and embellishing the experience with fast zooms and a new sense of scale, the company may in fact be moving further away from a successful formula.

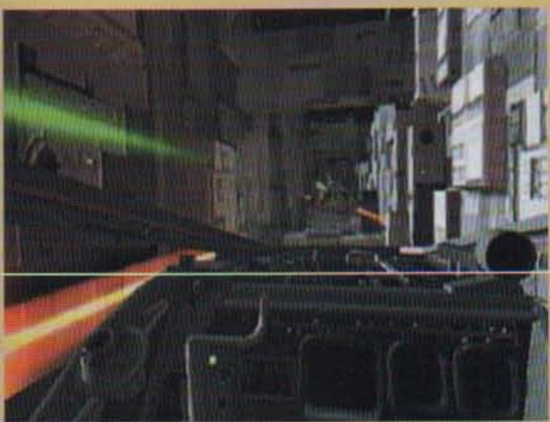
Rogue Squadron II

- Format: **GameCube**
- Publisher: **Nintendo**
- Developer: **Factor 5**



You'll be able to control two wingmen in the finished game, ordering them to offer you cover or to take out a particular target. In visual terms *Rogue Squadron II* is the best-looking GameCube title yet, with astonishing use of textures enhanced via the appearance of specularity and illumination











It took something like 30 seconds to realise how seriously LucasArts is taking GameCube when you saw that the company's first 128bit Nintendo project showcases the likes of Luke Skywalker, Cloud City, and Tie-Fighters. Not for this game the lame, made-up elements that have populated so many 'Star Wars'-themed videogames in recent years.

In fact, so serious is the company about this title that it has actually given developer Factor 5 countless photorealistic textures taken from the models originally used in the 1977 space opera classic. So, if the in-game Death Star looks like the 'real' thing, that's because it is made of the 'real' components.

In gameplay terms this is very much a retread of the original *Rogue Squadron*, although **Edge** was left largely unconvinced by the sections featuring the aforementioned Cloud City, preferring instead the encounters taking place over Star Destroyers, which genuinely captured the feel of the celluloid outing.

Developer Factor 5, a veteran of 'Star Wars' titles going all the way back to the SNES game, is pushing Nintendo's hardware like few other codeshops. A cruise across the rear of a Star Destroyer reveals large, exhaustively detailed exhaust ports – part of a model which, it is claimed, is built from 130,000 polys.

Surprisingly for a 128bit title, *Rogue Squadron II* takes no small amount of inspiration from the 1983 Atari coin-op, something immediately obvious when you see the GameCube version's Deathstar trench sequence, replete with horizontal beams to dodge. Prior to this, from the cockpit of your X-Wing you're faced with surface turrets whose tips can be destroyed, adding to the familiarity of the experience.

Mindful of the criticism levelled at the previous *Squadron*'s AI, Factor 5 is focusing a great deal of energy on Tie-Fighter behaviour to ensure they'll put up a fight rather than serving as mere cannon fodder.

In audio terms, John Williams and Chris Hülsbeck will be getting joint credit, the latter weaving the classic score into the nuances of the game.

The best-looking 'Star Wars' game yet? Yes. A GameCube must-have? Probably.

Star Fox Adventures: Dinosaur Planet



During combat, the view changes to a letterboxed format (top right). This feature has only just been implemented by Rare. Wonder where it came from?

- Format: **GameCube**
- Publisher: **Nintendo**
- Developer: **Rare**





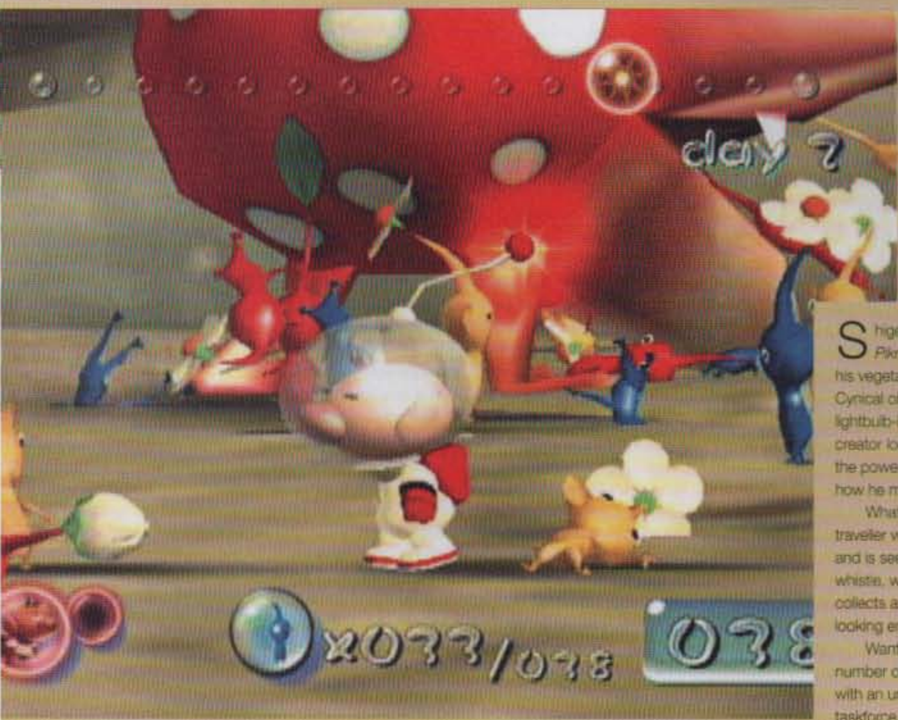


It's rumoured that, having joked at last year's E3 that he might well turn Rare's N64 title *Dinosaur Planet* into a *StarFox* game, Shigeru Miyamoto went away, thought about it some more, then decreed that this avenue must be explored. In truth, *StarFox Adventures* is the result of a co-operative alliance between west and east – apparently negotiations were already underway at the beginning of 2000.

Irrespective of this, it's worth noting that the *StarFox* lineage does not appear to have a massive effect on gameplay outside of the characters themselves – space-based sections appear to merely serve as links between McCloud's destination planets, offering less-than-earth-shattering diversions.

On the ground, the environments currently look somewhat spartan (a legacy of the game's 64bit heritage, perhaps?), but they are at least complemented by a raft of tasty graphical effects, including beautifully reflective ice. The combat and exploration action, however, seems at least as solid as anything else on the format.

Pikmin



Your adventurer can order Pikmin to be constructive and destructive – ie, fight. Some foes aren't too tough (main); others are plain evil (top right)

- Format: **GameCube**
- Publisher: **Nintendo**
- Developer: **In-house**







Shigeru Miyamoto claims that inspiration for *Pikmin* came calling while he rooted around in his vegetable patch in the garden of his new house. Cynical observers would surely claim that the lightbulb-illumination moment came as the legendary creator looked into the PC space, happened across the power of realtime strategy games, and pondered how he might translate their appeal to a console.

Whatever the case, in *Pikmin* you control a space traveller who's crashlanded on an unknown planet and is seeking a way off it. With the help of his whistle, with which he can give commands, he collects and rears the Pikmin of the title – small, cute-looking entities who are only too happy to help.

Want to chop down a plant? Simply gather a number of Pikmin and direct them to the task. Faced with an unfriendly alien creature? Then send your taskforce into battle. Unlike PC titles, executing such functions is a relative breeze, although the action can get slightly unwieldy when you're faced with up to 100 of the critters. One to watch carefully.

Eternal Darkness





- Format: **GameCube**
- Publisher: **Nintendo**
- Developer: **Silicon Knights**



From secondparty American outfit Silicon Knights comes *Eternal Darkness*, one of the few overtly adult-oriented GameCube titles shown at E3.

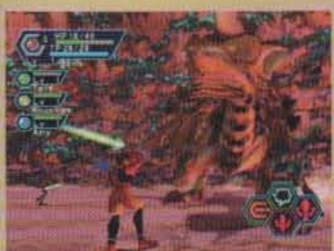
Sadly, **Edge**'s experience of the title revealed that the aspect *Eternal Darkness* has most in common with other 'adult' titles is that it plays very much like a PC game. Electing to assume the role of a slightly constipated-looking Roman warrior-style character, for example, sees you plodding around in a most lethargic fashion, with combat involving slashing in the rough direction of a foe, slashing again, then watching as it is felled. It's like the beautifully honed fighting mechanics of the 64bit *Zeldas* never happened.

To its credit, the game's camera has been implemented with some flair (although its strict scripting lends an oddly prerendered feel to the action), and some of its content is genuinely non-Nintendo (you descend into various levels of insanity throughout, resulting in much unpleasant imagery). It's no *Silent Hill 2*, but *Darkness* marks an interesting new avenue for the company.

Three characters are available, offering a number of different weapons from various periods in time. But it's the darker elements that will appease many

Phantasy Star Online Ver. 2





- Format: **GameCube**
- Publisher: **Sega**
- Developer: **In-house (Sonic Team)**



On first impressions it might as well have a Dreamcast game. But then, within the confines of Sega's invite-only E3 area, you spot a GameCube playing host to the update to one of the world's most infamous RPGs. It pulled it out of nowhere, but Sonic Team's *PSOv2* was one of the show's hidden gems.

With Nintendo remaining guarded concerning its online gaming plans, it was intriguing to see the title running in fourplayer splitscreen mode. Creator Yuji Naka boldly claimed that each window was generating the amount of visual data of a Dreamcast running the equivalent game in one window, and it was difficult to deny it: like Sega's other games on non-native hardware, it looked absolutely gorgeous.

Apparently it will not be possible to link GameCube and Dreamcast *PSOv2* players, which is a sad revelation. More heartening, though, is the simple fact that Sonic Team is bringing this, arguably its hottest property in many years, to Nintendo's format – a concrete sign that GameCube is a favoured platform for Japanese thirdparties.

Antialiasing is an easy graphical mechanic on Nintendo's hardware, meaning that this conversion looks pretty much identical to the DC original

Kameo



Around 60 monsters should make the final cut. They currently range from a wall-climbing lizard, to a lumbering orc, to a tiny, fire-breathing Yoshi lookalike

- Format: **GameCube**
- Publisher: **Nintendo**
- Developer: **Rare**

Another title pulled out of Nintendo's bag of surprises at E3 was this, an unusual adventure-themed game focusing on a princess called Kameo, who captures animals which can be developed and used alongside her in battle.

The biggest *Kameo* talking point at E3 concerned its animation, which is among the best so far showcased on the system. In a clever twist, the heroine can adopt the persona of her 'pets', at which point her torso can be seen moving within the semi-translucent skin of her host.

It's not yet clear whether *Kameo* will be a one-trick pony or something incredibly sophisticated. For example, certain tasks require your character to surmount cliff faces – does she transform into a gecko-style creature and scale them, or does she seek a beast with the capacity to fly? If these are the only two options available then this may be a distinctly linear experience, but it would be tantalising to see all manner of other options open to the player. It's still early days, but fingers are crossed.







Super Monkey Ball



Possibly the most simplistic game at E3, *Super Monkey Ball* didn't garner as large an audience as it deserved because of Sega's invite-only policy

- Format: **GameCube**
- Publisher: **Sega**
- Developer: **Amusement Vision**

You read 'AV Out' in **Edge** every month, so you should by now have a good idea what its creator, Toshihiro Nagoshi, is bringing to GameCube.

Super Monkey Ball is as simple a concept as they come: you have one control element at your disposal – the analogue stick. Tilting it in any direction forces the flat polygon that makes up each level to manoeuvre in accordance. You have no direct control over your monkey-in-a-ball hero; his movement corresponds only to that of his surroundings.

Each level takes the form of a different shape, naturally progressing in complexity, from straightforward zig-zags to more convoluted types, such as one shaped in the form of a guitar template. On your way from A to B, however, you're encouraged to collect bananas – up against a strict timer it becomes a matter of pushing your luck to the limit while keeping a sober eye on your goal.

The splitscreen fourplayer mode should be the making of this coin-op conversion, creating a perfect party game dynamic.







Halo



- Format: **XBox**
- Publisher: **Microsoft**
- Developer: **Bungie Software**

PC owners, fear not – this is still set to make an appearance on your monitor. Microsoft, keen to counter rumours that Xbox will be a base for PC ports, claims this will be the only firstparty title to appear on the two formats, as it was originally intended for PC. As such, it will honour this



Understandably the most popular title on XBox's continuously busy stand, Bungie's first/thirdperson effort detailing mankind's struggle against the Covenant race on a ring-like planet made yet another prestigious E3 appearance. The most significant addition to the title since Microsoft's Gamestock event in March is the inclusion of squad members in the oneplayer game; 15 fellow CPU combatants start the mission alongside you and while, sadly, most are unlikely to be there to the end, they all appear to be able to take care of themselves. You won't necessarily believe you're playing along with human partners, but the AI is sufficiently advanced to add plenty of character to the action. For instance, take control of a jeep and you probably won't think twice about handing the shooting duty over to a CPU soldier, who'll happily handle the mounted gun at the rear and make a commendable job of picking off Covenant scum. Importantly, you feel part of a team, and to a certain extent, you care about your comrades' status, making the experience considerably more involving.

Also adding to the overall atmosphere is the way the game has been designed so that it plays continuously – there are no loading screens once the action begins, and there's also a clever autosave function (see Frontend). Presently there are no control issues to report. Granted, at times the XBox controller can feel like a chunky quarterpounder in your hands, but with *Halo* this bemusing effect isn't as pronounced as when playing, say, *Amped*. In fact, at this stage the only criticism would be the framerate issues revealed by the E3 demo, particularly the splitscreen fourplayer refresh, which suffered massively. Expect some improvement – this is unlikely to ship before Bungie has completely overcome this current hitch in terms of oneplayer. However, the splitscreen option may require graphical trade-offs given the visual quality of the main game.

Other than that, the weapon selection continues to impress, and detailed touches such as alien weapons overheating are encouraging.



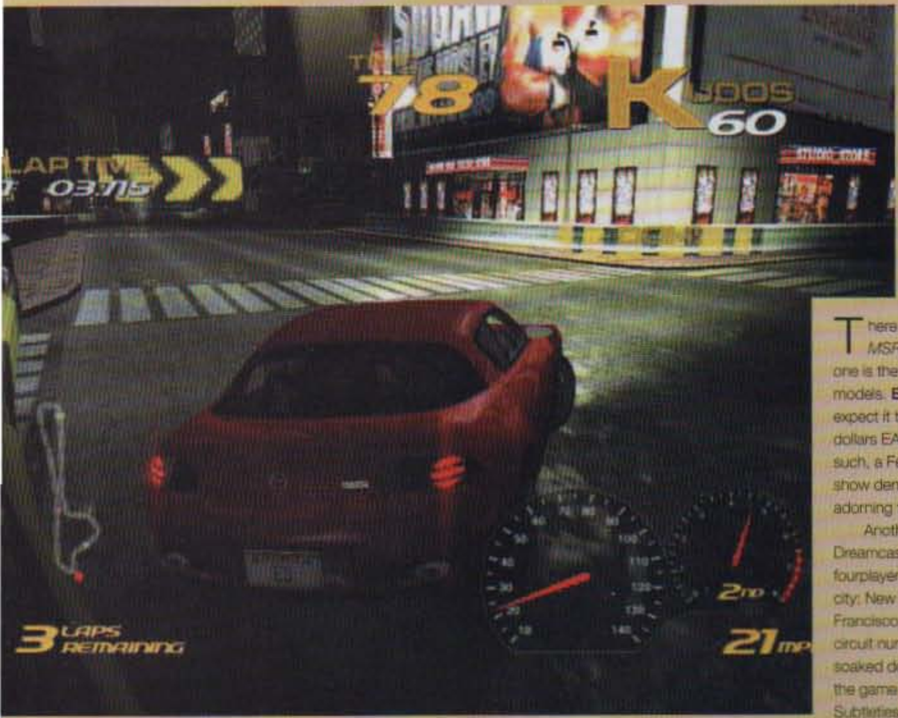








Project Gotham Racing



The XBox version of the game promises to include around 20 vehicles – early signs would indicate a fairly different selection than that of the DC game

- Format: **XBox**
- Publisher: **Microsoft**
- Developer: **Bizarre Creations**







There are some notable changes from Dreamcast *MSR*. Other than expected visual improvements, one is the inclusion of Porsche and, amazingly, Ferrari models. **Edge** isn't privy to the details of the deal, but expect it to involve Microsoft having to send a lot of dollars EA's way in order to obtain the licence. As such, a Ferrari F355 was playable as part of the show demo, while an F50 could be seen adorning the game box artwork.

Another excellent addition to the revered Dreamcast package is damage, as well as fourplayer splitscreen and the inclusion of a fourth city: New York now joins London, Tokyo, and San Francisco, boosting the racing areas to 12 and the circuit number past the 200 mark. A night-time, rain-soaked downtown NY route was playable at E3, and the game felt as rewarding as the Dreamcast version. Subtleties should, of course, make themselves apparent with prolonged play, but show conditions certainly don't prove themselves particularly conducive to such nit-picking.

Jet Set Radio Future



JSRF levels are impressively complex. The floatiness of the controls remained but the overall speed increase improved matters. Expect multiplayer modes

- Format: **XBox**
- Publisher: **Sega**
- Developer: **Smilebit**







As expected, Sega's XBox support is going to provide some unmissable titles. First up is this *Jet Set Radio* sequel. Again set in Tokyo, but this time in the year 2024, *JSR Future* was easily one of the most visually impressive titles **Edge** had the pleasure to witness at E3. Shown only in video form on the stand but playable in one of Microsoft's upstairs booths, even at this early stage (supposedly only ten per cent complete), advancements over the DC version were clear. **Edge** couldn't even detect a soupçon of slowdown. The stability of the environments is phenomenal, without a hint of scenery build-up regardless of the fulsome draw distance, the seemingly greater complexity of the demo level's architecture, and the higher resolution of the display. The action is much faster, too, particularly once the speed-boost function is enabled (illustrated by anime-style speed streaks), and the improved trick repertoire allows for speedier, more adventurous gravity-defying frolics.

This is going to be very special.

Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee







- Format: **XBox**
- Publisher: **Microsoft**
- Developer: **Oddworld Inhabitants**



The plot remains unchanged: you must still make co-operative use of the two central protagonists' individual abilities to save Abe's mother from doom

Another massively popular E3 game, *Munch's Oddysee* continues its journey towards potential triple-A status. You can now use Abe's telepathic competence to transform Mudokons into warrior types which come to your rescue should you come across an unfriendly and violent obstacle. In fact, one of the funnier E3 game-related moments occurred while Oddworld Inhabitants' Lorne Lanning demo'd the game. Lanning had convinced 15-odd Mudokons to follow Abe around the lush environments, got them to wait on one side of the bridge while he crossed, and allowed Abe to get his face pummelled by a sizeable enemy before luring the latter back towards his posse, which wasted little time in kicking the hell out of the bully.

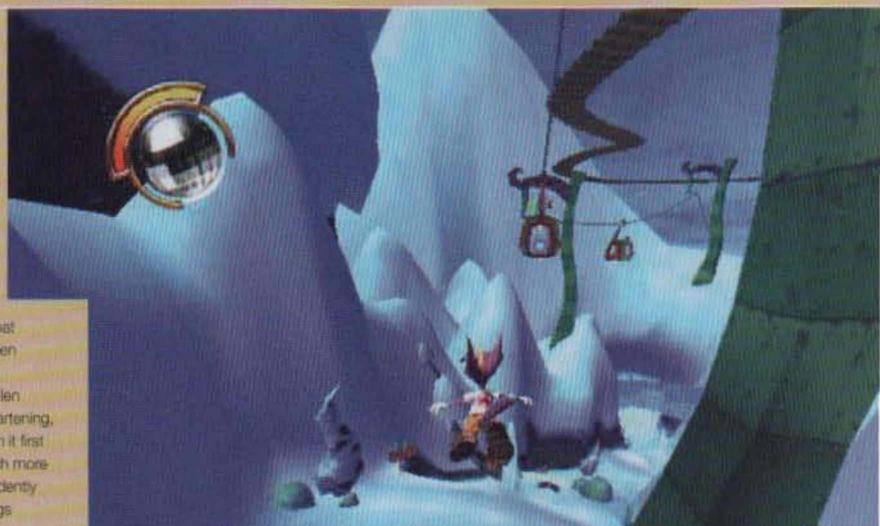
It's this character richness that sets the game apart, and combined with surprisingly fluid controls (despite the 3D setting), and a convincing 'intelligent' camera system, the end result isn't unlike playing a fully interactive CGI cartoon. Which, you imagine, was Lanning's intention from the start.

Mad Dash Racing





- Format: **XBox**
- Publisher: **Eidos**
- Developer: **Crystal Dynamics**



Although already reasonably fun to play on your own, **Edge** expects the emphasis of the finished game to be on the promised multiplayer aspects

According to the developer, this is combat adventure racing. **Edge** has always been a little dubious about running games, simply because nearly all of the past efforts have fallen short of the mark in some way. It's a little heartening, then, to find that *Mad Dash* plays better than it first looks. Don't misunderstand: there's still much more to check before anything resembling a confidently positive verdict is given out, but at least things look more promising than was feared.

Running your way along A-to-B, multiple-routed levels, you're entitled to use the tricks your chosen character places at your disposal in order to win. *Mario Kart*-style speed patches and weaponry also play significant parts.

Graphically, this was one of the few XBox demos not to show signs of framerate issues and on the whole things looked impressive. In particular, the animation is well realised and the characterisation helps bring the various protagonists to life. More importantly, it plays solidly, too.

Dead Or Alive 3



From the footage shown, Team Ninja appears to have grasped the intricacies of Microsoft's 128bit machine – let's hope there's plenty of innovation, too

- Format: **XBox**
- Publisher: **Tecmo**
- Developer: **In-house**







Not playable, but the realtime footage was enough to send many into orbit. **Edge**, on the other hand, kept its feet on the ground. Which is not to say the video wasn't impressive – it featured some of the most stirring character animation and graphics to feature in a beat 'em up: at one point, one of the fighters bounces his way down a cliff, while clothing moves impressively realistically, for instance. With the camera free from the usual restraints of displaying in-play action, Tecmo engages in unfettered flights across some monstrous areas without a single polygon out of place and with a draw distance as far the eye would realistically see. Other than technical porn, play mechanics appear familiar, which can only bode well. Also consistent with the *DOA* universe is the interactivity with your playing arenas – a particularly memorable sequence involves a contender being hit through an imposing ice column, which naturally shatters. But regardless of such graphical wizardry, let's hope some innovation manages to fight its way on to the disc.

Blood Wake



Not **Edge**'s favourite genre, for a boat-combat title this turned out surprisingly playable. It's certainly frantic stuff, ensuring you keep moving at all times

- Format: **XBox**
- Publisher: **Microsoft**
- Developer: **Stormfront Studios**







In an ideal world, powerful boats and big guns shouldn't mix – all hell breaks loose, as proved by Microsoft's watercraft-based fast-action combat title. Before you'd know it, you'd have a mean-looking catamaran in your wake, with two homing missiles not far off your stern. In addition to angry captains, *Blood Wake* also offers torpedo boats, sampans, devil boats, and another six types of floating contraptions. All are bristling with chain guns, cannons, rockets, mines, and other high-impact weaponry. The oneplayer option delivers more than 25 missions in dynamic environments, ranging from straightforward ship/fort attack situations to the escort of recon sorties. The game was playing well at E3 – the boats felt suitably heavy and certainly seemed to react accurately to the impressively modelled sea, while the opposition kept you continuously occupied. The final game should see you playing alongside CPU shipmates (or humans in splitscreen multiplayer) in what promises to be an entertaining boating game.

Fuzion Frenzy







- Format: **XBox**
- Publisher: **Microsoft**
- Developer: **Blitz Games**



Another indication of the commanding diversity of the XBox line-up, *Fuzion Frenzy* is what *Mario Party* would look like after a futuristic, post-apocalyptic makeover. The visuals may look darker and certainly more metallic, but the essence remains the same: four players battle each other over a series of challenges (in this case, 45). With games of this genre the emphasis is very much on keeping things moving swiftly along, and thankfully Blitz Games (the Oliver twins set-up responsible for imaginative output such as *Glover*) hasn't misunderstood this crucial element, making *Fuzion Frenzy* as immediate as the game's format will allow. If the fourplayer battles at E3 proved anything, it was that a fierce competition is rapidly established – **Edge** took great pleasure in trouncing a particular US journalist who somewhat erroneously thought himself invincible. To his credit, he fought back convincingly, winning the next couple of games. But that just made final (and overall) victory all the more sweet. A promising sign of a good game.

Some of the levels are impressively complex when compared with previous party games. Fast, furious competition delivers an engrossing experience

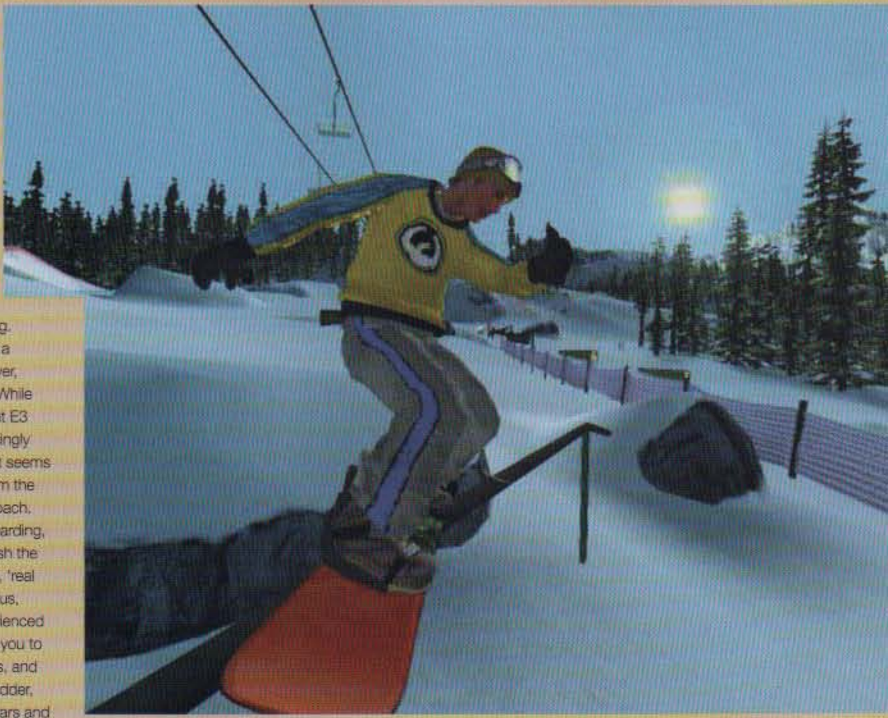
Amped: Freestyle Snowboarding







- Format: **XBox**
- Publisher: **Microsoft**
- Developer: **In-house**



Amped's visuals aren't entirely convincing. They're perfectly adequate, but there's a noticeable lack of polish at this stage. However, the title impresses in more interesting ways. While seemingly every other snowboarding game at E3 appeared content with dishing out a depressingly similar set of structure and options, Microsoft seems genuinely keen to differentiate its product from the competition with a cleverly thought out approach. Most crucially, the game feels delightfully rewarding, inspiring confidence in the player to really push the Gore-Tex-enclosed trick envelope. The open, 'real piste'-like design of the courses is another plus, and removes the tunnel effect so often experienced in games of this ilk. And placing the onus on you to get noticed by photographers, camera crews, and sponsors in order to ascend the popularity ladder, become one of the planet's snowboarding stars and hence progress through the game, is a particularly intelligent touch. It's safe to say that you can expect big things from this.

Pulling tricks feels pleasingly intuitive, no doubt a result of the countless snowboarding games on the market. But this one is more promising than most

NASCAR Heat



To make sure the title covers the widest potential market, *Heat* offers two modes of play: normal (arcade-like handling) and expert (simulation option)

- Format: **XBox**
- Publisher: **Infogrames**
- Developer: **Monster Games**

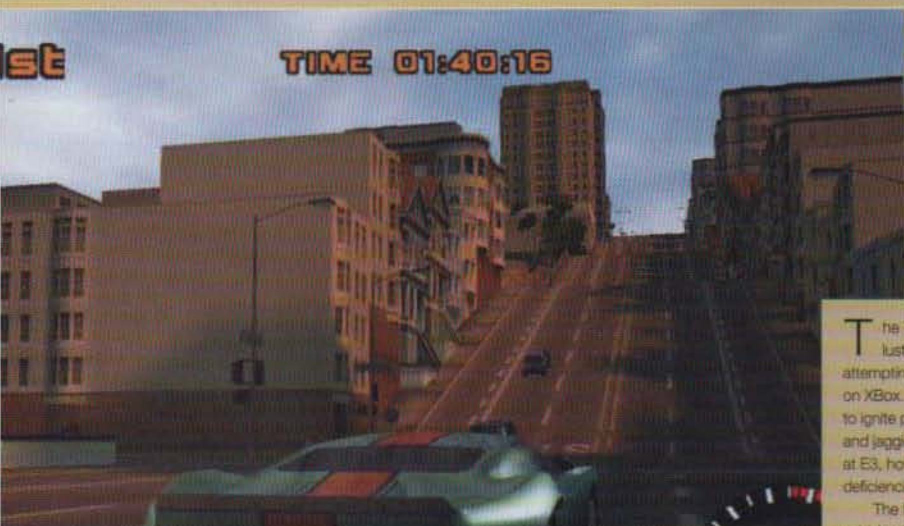






The 'Heat' of the title refers to the Beat The Heat option, a challenging series of racing scenarios presented and designed by some of the game's actual 25 NASCAR Winston Cup drivers. There are other options, of course: single race and championship events are joined by Race The Pro, where you attempt to outrun a phantom motor driven by the sport's top dogs. No true NASCAR game would be any fun without damage and this is an area Monster Games hasn't overlooked – realtime scratches, sparks and realtime bodywork deformation are promised. Also on the features list is Dolby Digital 5.1, but whether this extends to the sound effects as well as the soundtrack remains to be clarified (realtime 5.1 sfx is currently only possible on XBox). More exciting, however, is the promise of 16player online support. Visually, there's still some track to make up – the environments are pleasingly solid and realistic but they also appear a little bland at the moment. Still, there's a few months left for the developer to embellish *Heat*'s 19 racing arenas.

Test Drive



The finished game will offer a 16:9 display option, a fourplayer splitscreen mode, plus licensed cars including the Nissan Skyline and Aston Martin DB7

- Format: **XBox**
- Publisher: **Infogrames**
- Developer: **Pitbull Syndicate**





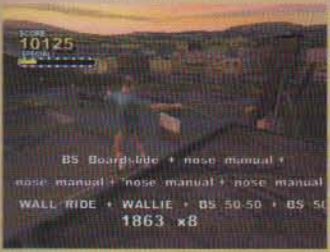


The *Test Drive* series may have long since lost its lustre as a racing brand, but Infogrames is attempting to reinvent it as its lead petrolhead game on XBox. At first sight, the version running at E3 failed to ignite passions, with significant pop-up, slowdown, and jaggies issues. Like every other XBox developer at E3, however, Pitbull promised that these deficiencies will be addressed on final silicon.

The finished game will offer around 20 licensed vehicles (which will not suffer damage – at the behest of their manufacturers), and a selection of races based on real locations. Though modelled on actual routes, the tracks are being tweaked, with an extra curve here and there in order to introduce a dash of racing spice. Expect to thunder across the Golden Gate Bridge (itself consisting of more polys than the entirety of models used in the last PS1 *Test Drive*, according to Infogrames' producer), then, only for it to give way to less familiar territory.

Though definitely in need of much work, this remains an intriguing XBox prospect.

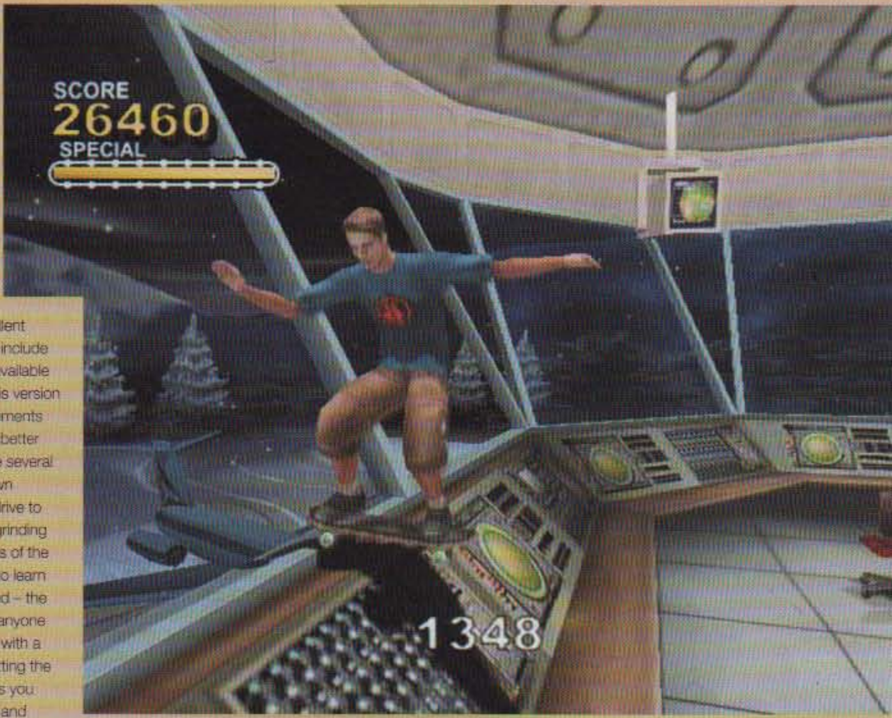
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2x







- Format: **XBox**
- Publisher: **Activision**
- Developer: **In-house**



An enhanced version of the already excellent *THPS2* available on DC and PS, *2x* will include all of the levels from the two games already available on said formats. In addition, new areas for this version are also promised, with overall visual improvements essentially amounting to a higher detail level, better special effects, and smoother animation. Like several of the other XBox titles, you can load your own soundtrack onto the 128bit machine's hard drive to make up your personal tune selection while grinding and ollieing your way around the screen. Fans of the remarkably successful franchise will be glad to learn that gameplay has made it across unmolested – the XBox pad takes a little of getting used to for anyone who's spent most of their digital skating time with a Dual Shock in their hands (you'll initially be hitting the occasional wrong button), but **Edge** imagines you soon adapt to the ten-buttoned, two sticked and single D-padded plastic contraption's bulkier dimensions, meaning *2x* should turn out as essential as *THPS*'s most recent outing.

One particularly interesting feature of *2x* is the ability to link with other XBox owners for simultaneous multiplayer fun. Expect a similar option when online

Unreal Championship







- Format: **XBox**
- Publisher: **Infogrames**
- Developer: **Digital Extremes**



One of Infogrames' biggest games of E3, *Unreal Championship* was the result of what the company claimed was only four months' work. This was some claim, given the advanced nature of the title's 3D engine, which casts some of the most atmospheric shadows even seen in gaming (to the point where even your own weapon is individually affected). *Championship* also excels with its particle manipulation: during **Edge**'s demo the game's producer fired a weapon through gases pluming vertically from an exhaust vent, creating an effect not unlike some alien form of smoke ring.

Outside of this specially created demo area, however, things did not look so rosy. Upon generating just one enemy, the framerate began chop and grind, significantly detracting from the beauty elsewhere.

Eleven weapons are promised for the final build (some executable in combo-like fashion), and the developer is aiming to get the game finished to coincide with the rolling out of XBox's broadband network. It could be worth the wait.

These static shots hint at what Digital Extremes has achieved with only four months' work. The game doesn't yet move as smoothly as silk, however

Jak And Daxter: The Precursor Legacy



- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **SCEA**
- Developer: **Naughty Dog**

Very, very pretty, but how innovative? Edge hopes the rest of *Jak And Daxter* proves a little more surprising than the demo experienced during E3. You can at least expect typical Naughty Dog-like sub games such as A-GraV Zoomer racing, which could be fun – whatever form it may take



Developer Naughty Dog, famed for its commercially successful *Crash Bandicoot* series, emerged at E3 from a two-year development silence with one of the most visually imposing PS2 titles to date. *Jak And Daxter* is, rather predictably, the three-dimensional action adventure of Jak – a pointy eared, blonde-haired youngster – and his best friend Daxter – now weasel-like being after falling in a vat of Dark Eco, which is nasty stuff. In the hope of getting the latter to revert to his normal appearance the two travel in search of the sage in the north of their alien planet. But along the way, they uncover a sinister plot that affects the planet's population...

The adventure takes place along a massive coastline and as there is no loading to interrupt the action – you can make your way seamlessly to the furthest point you see on the screen. The world itself is made up of three villages, each with its own environmental attributes such as day, time and weather conditions. Furthermore, expect to find individual gameplay attributes for each of the zones.

There was little innovation on show in the E3 demo, and the game appeared to borrow elements of *Mario*, *Zelda*, *Sonic Adventure*, and *Crash Bandicoot* itself (in the form of a spin attack). However, it would be unfair to pass judgement on the basis of so little play time,and closer inspection will doubtless reveal distinct properties. It's just a little disappointing to find so many clichés already in place (smashing crates, collecting jewels, etc).

One aspect **Edge** can comment on is *Jak And Daxter*'s technical merits. The draw distance is phenomenal and the environment is one of the most accomplished **Edge** has seen in videogame form. The animation of the protagonists is inspired and there are no real control issues. In addition, the AI is claimed to be fairly complex, with enemies tracking you should you foolishly decide to ignore them – again, a closer look should reveal the validity of such statements. As it stands *Jak And Daxter* is a very pretty game with elements of massmarket – hence distinctly generic – appeal.











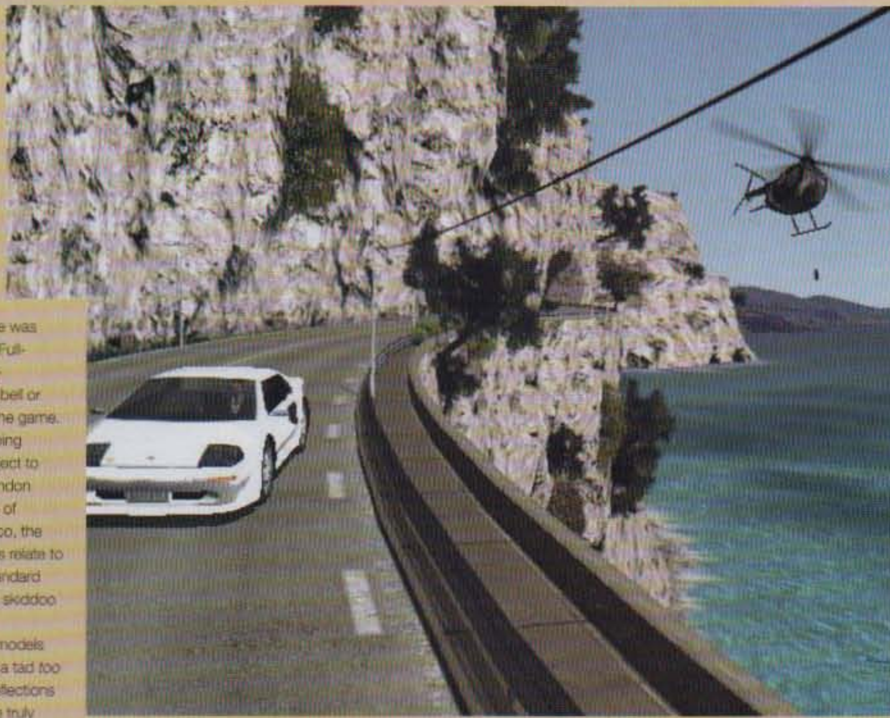
Stuntman







- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **Infogrames**
- Developer: **Reflections**



From a purely technical standpoint, there was little to touch *Stuntman* on PS2 at E3. Full-scene anti-aliasing, wrapping shadows, mip-mapping: just about any particular graphical bell or whistle you could wish for appears to be in the game.

You're the eponymous stuntman, a jobbing Hollywood adrenaline freak moving from project to project, something which takes you from London (working on a distinctly 'Lock, Stock...' style of movie), to Egypt, and on to Bangkok, Monaco, the Swiss Alps, and Louisiana. Your assignments relate to the context of the setting, so while a bog-standard car will be your vehicle of choice in Blighty, a skiddoo comes into play in the Alps, and so on.

Having experimented with physical car models with its *Driver* series (pushing PS1 hardware a tad *too* far with its last title, sadly), with *Stuntman* Reflections is busy refining dynamics, and the results are truly jaw-dropping. Every single element of each vehicle is fully realised, while inertia is implemented with careful precision. A killer PS2 title in the making.

Around 20 massively varied stunts will make it into the final code. Completing them affords you bonus objects which you can place in your own 'play' arena

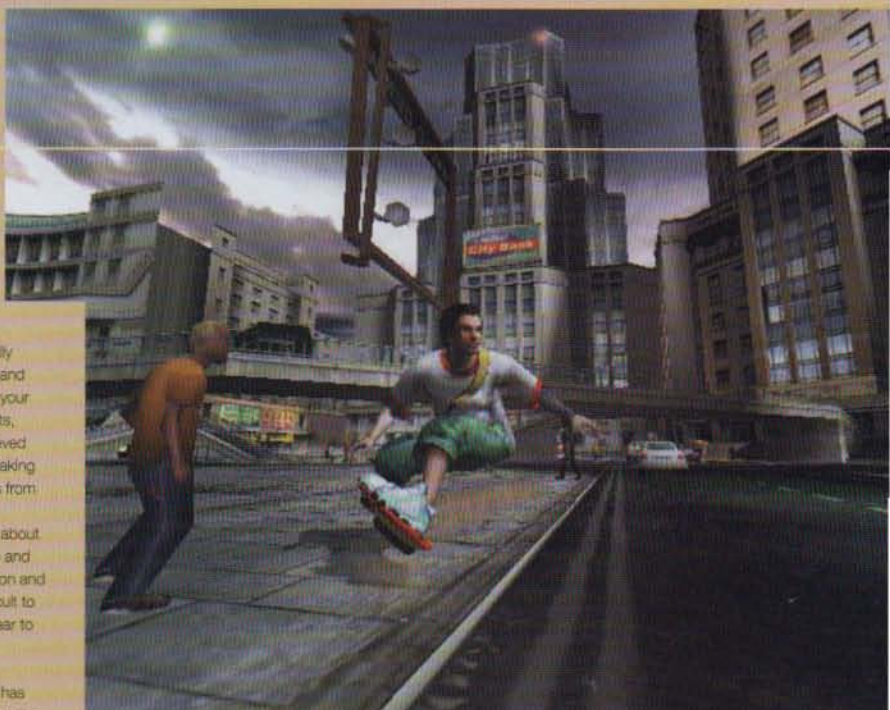
AirBlade







- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **SCEE**
- Developer: **Criterion**



AirBlade is an extension of popular hoverboarding title *TrickStyle*. Technically heartening, gameplay is surprisingly smooth and the ability to use your surroundings to boost your trick repertoire (such as swing from lampposts, grind vertices or plant vehicles) is again achieved with silkiness of action very much in mind. Making your way to the top of buildings just seconds from being at street level is easily achievable.

Unlike its spiritual predecessor, this isn't about racing – environments have been opened up and are freely explorable. The game is both mission and narrative based, a concept that is a little difficult to digest given that somehow this doesn't appear to fit in with the character and atmosphere the game evokes – at this stage, at least.

Perhaps too much *Tony Hawk's* playing has resulted in the immediate assumption that a game like *AirBlade* would be challenge and/or hi-score based. Regardless, **Edge** certainly has its eye on this one.

Isn't it amazing what you can do with *RenderWare* when you have talent? And you should see what Criterion has managed with *SRC*, its other PS2 title

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3



The environments in *THPS3* are far more populated, both in terms of civilians (pedestrians and cars), and inanimate objects – which of course provide the fun

- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **Activision**
- Developer: **Neversoft/Shaba**

Never one to let a good thing get away, Activision is making sure it cashes in on the current resurgence of skateboarding by squeezing out another Tony Hawk game before the end of the year on just about every console available. What makes this otherwise cynical approach a lot easier to swallow is the fact that the other two Hawk games have proved supremely enjoyable (particularly the sequel), and from **Edge**'s sample at E3, this one appears to follow suit. But it's worth remembering the perils of stretching a good thing too far.

Still, *THPS3* it is, then. The graphics are obviously significantly improved, and the smoothness of the animation is more convincing, in terms of both tricks and bails. The environments (which includes hot boarding spots Rhode Island, Rio de Janeiro, Los Angeles, Canada, Tokyo, Paris, and Skater's Island in Middleton) are now more life-like, with pedestrians, cars, traffic accidents, natural disasters and changing weather putting in an appearance.

A million-seller on PS2? Count on it.







Maximo: Ghosts To Glory



The environments are dynamic, sometimes breaking up around you. And the music is said to be brilliant but it couldn't be heard above the usual E3 racket

- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **Capcom**
- Developer: **In-house**

Maximo plays almost like you'd expect a 3D version of *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* to behave if Nintendo had been given the task of updating the franchise (it is in fact the work of Capcom's American development facility). Coincidentally, the game also displays an environment solidity and stability that you usually only find in NCL's products.

Over 40 power-ups and abilities can be found through the game, meaning each player can customise their character, and Maximo's shield not only protects against attacks from the undead but can also be thrown as a weapon or powered up for special attacks. Your sword offers similar options.

With all conceptual art provided by legendary Japanese crayon-wielder Susumu Matsushita, *Maximo* has an immediately striking look, and Capcom fans of old will delight in picking out old franchise elements now rendered in full 3D.

Some found the game's arcadey fun too shallow for their tastes, but *Maximo* remains a major player on **Edge**'s best-of-E3 list.







DropShip







- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **SCEE**
- Developer: **In-house (Studio Camden)**



Two *DropShip* missions were offered at E3 – an easy, introductory training level followed by the decent challenge of a 'hard' contribution – and **Edge** completed both, finding it compelling stuff.

The game environments are impressively stable, with massive draw distance, but the actual flight dynamics are particularly well realised, with your ship's hovering/afterburning abilities opening up various tactical approaches when completing the mission's various demands. It's not only about flying around, however, with the demo's second mission requiring you to take control of an armoured assault vehicle halfway through the action. Others, both air- and land-based, are available, of course.

The mission structure appears to offer variety (for instance, escort and recon undertakings), and the feeling of belonging to a team, albeit a CPU-controlled one, is strongly conveyed. In this respect, an iLink option for human support would definitely improve matters, but the absence of such could still leave a fine oneplayer experience.

Visually, things have improved significantly since *DropShip*'s debut. It's now able to proudly take its place among the second-generation PS2 crowd

World Rally Championship







- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **SCEE**
- Developer: **Evolution Studios**



When **Edge** first saw *WRC*, its developer had four driving models on the go. Only one made E3, but the experience wasn't quite as smooth as first hoped. The cars were behaving in a markedly erratic manner, the result of extremely twitchy steering dynamics. A word with the Martin Kenwright, Evo Studio's MD, proved reassuring – he too was displeased with the way the cars behaved. One element you could already gain, however, was that underneath all the commotion, the cars were actually reacting to the road in a realistic manner. Now it's 'simply' a case of tweaking things to achieve the correct authenticity/playability equation.

Other than that, pretty much everything else appeared to be coming along in fine fashion – technically the action looks suitably authentic, with some striking replay camera action. But it was a shame to see spectators forced to remain behind protective barriers – at the request of the overly stringent FIA, no doubt – hence spoiling some of the atmosphere.

The dedication to authenticity is remarkable – let's hope it doesn't affect the handling in a negative fashion. Expect real weather and 108 stages in total

Rubu Tribe



Some creatures are less friendly than others. Most impressive is the scale of the Uut (bottom right), the giant beast which carries your village on its back

- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **Interplay**
- Developer: **Outrage Entertainment**







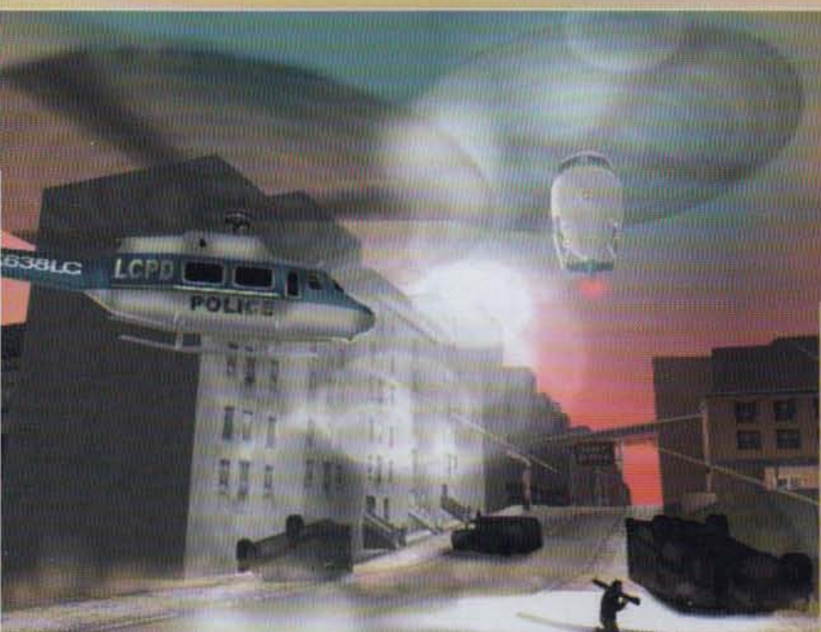
You're a member of the eponymous tribe, charged with escorted a lumbering, gargantuan, prehistoric-looking quadruped (whose back is home to your settlement), called the Uut, across fantastical, verdant landscapes. Sound familiar? No, that's because *Rubu Tribe* is unlike just about everything you've ever seen – and certainly a breath of fresh air for Sony's console.

Outrage, which previously worked on the *Descent* series, is the codeshop behind this innovative title. It has built the Rubu in the mould of Jim Henson-style characters, and this distinctive feel is also infused in other environmental aspects.

You're naturally the leader of the clan, and as your journey progresses (you're in search of 'a mystical place', apparently) you face hardships from aggresive native fauna and, mysteriously, from within the Rubu tribe itself.

Your character's 'squid stick' weapon, which has myriad uses, is just another innovative aspect of this promising-looking PS2 adventure.

Grand Theft Auto 3



It was only running at around 25-30fps at E3, but *Grand Theft Auto 3*'s content was more than enough to ensure a steady stream of attendee interest

- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **Rockstar Games**
- Developer: **In-house**







Pushing *Grand Theft Auto* into full 3D was always going to be the next step in Rockstar's development of the series, although taking such established gameplay components and turning their presentation on its head was always going to be a hazard-strewn enterprise. Fortunately, from the dubious delights **Edge** savoured at E3, many excellent elements will appear in this third instalment.

Wandering around city streets, it's as easy as it was in the first game to simply haul an innocent driver out of his seat and make off with the vehicle itself. With the move to 3D, though, your actions, once masked by a more simplistic portrayal, have more immediate impact. Equally, mowing down pedestrians brings with it previously unwitnessed levels of responsibility and consequence.

Having driven *GTA 3*'s Humvee lookalike and a fire truck, not to mention all manner of less interesting automobiles, **Edge** cannot wait to sample more of Rockstar's latest – especially if the developer can address the noticeable framerate issues.

Frequency





- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **SCEA**
- Developer: **Harmonix**



Undoubtedly, there's something mesmerising about *Frequency*'s visuals but, thankfully, there appears to be the gameplay in there to back it up convincingly

Frequency is played like something resembling one of the early webs from *Tempest*. Each of the channels represents an instrument (vocals, bass, drums, guitar, etc), and as you move along you have to hit one of three joypad buttons to coincide with the timing of onscreen instructions.

If you complete a bar successfully, you should then move across to another instrument and do the same – which you choose is up to you, hence the ability to freestyle your way through the 'level'.

While **Edge** only tried the (admittedly engrossing) Solo Remix mode, five further game options are available, including a fiveplayer battle; remix your own music selection (which you can then send to a fellow for him to try out as a new level); and (at some point) online play, which promises multiplayer live jam sessions.

In a sea of licences and sequels, *Frequency* stood out as something of a risk from Sony America, but the game's specific nuances could prove a shot in the arm for the creativity-starved PS2.

Wipeout Fusion





- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **SCEE**
- Developer: **In-house (Studio Liverpool)**



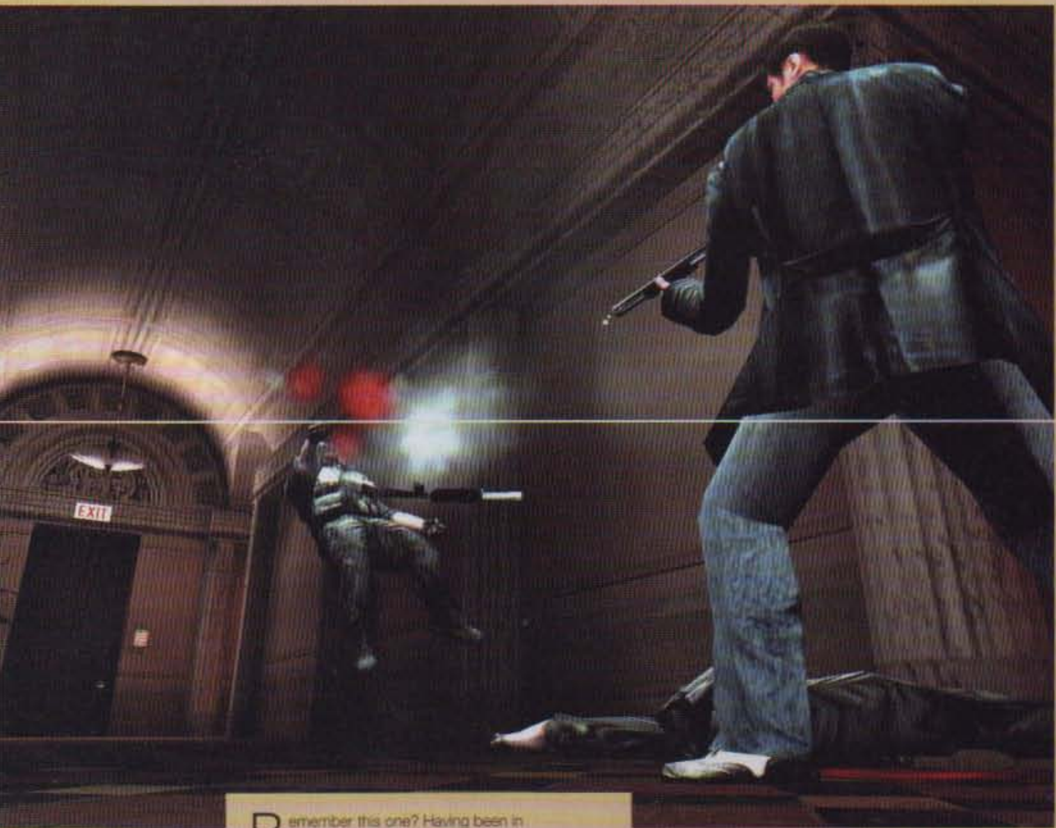
Certainly technically accomplished enough to draw gamers' attention. But enough to get them to buy it at a time when realism-based games rule the tracks?

Wipeout Fusion is fast. Very, very, very fast. It's also, surprisingly, visually very close to what the developer promised during last year's E3, which **Edge** admits to thinking was a little far fetched at the time.

You hover around in the same manner as you have three times beforehand on PS – the dynamics are at the very least as accomplished – with the floor-based turbo pads momentarily boosting you to some silly velocity. Yet this is only in the lowest class – **Edge** tried out the higher-ranked ships and can assure you that for the majority of non-android types things are going to get very difficult. Human beings simply don't have the required reflexes needed to guide the top-end craft at the speeds the game occasionally throws you into – not without bouncing your way around the track. At least you then get to experience the 'situation sensitive' vessel damage firsthand.

Overall, an encouraging title for PS2. But given the disappointing sales of *Wipeout 3*, will a further sequel grab the masses like it's 1995?

Max Payne



- Format: **PC**
- Publisher: **Take 2**
- Developer: **Remedy**

What you can't see from these screenshots is the way Remedy conveys the plot – static graphic novel like-images are displayed onscreen while surprisingly convincing voice acting plays over the top. It's one of the more effective approaches **Edge** has come across in a long, long time













Remember this one? Having been in development for longer than most magazines stay in existence nowadays, Remedy's film noir made yet another E3 appearance, albeit a remarkably convincing one this year. Most of those unimpressed by *Max Payne* at E3 had probably only seen the trailer. This is a shame, because **Edge** also saw the trailer, but was then shown the game by the developer in an RV doubling as a booth on the Gathering of Developers stand and it looked an infinitely more rousing prospect.

Film noir inspired and easily one of the most stylish titles to have appeared in recent times, *Max Payne* tells the story of an undercover New York cop who returns home to find his wife murdered. It turns out he's also been framed. On the run and looking for revenge, the rest of the action is up to you. One aspect that immediately stands out is the astounding level of detail. At the start of the demo, the developer moved the camera away from a close-up of Max's face that everyone had until then assumed was an intro screen. Panning across to the gun in his hand, 'Beretta' could not only be clearly seen adorning the barrel, it actually looked stamped into the metal surface. At the end of the barrel the obligatory flame effect, and some five metres from the frozen character, a single bullet clearly looked brutally keen to continue carving its way through the night air.

Borrowing from 'The Matrix', players are allowed to indulge in 'bullet time'. The advantage, as everything onscreen goes into slow motion, is that you're allowed to react just that little bit swifter than your opponents, extricating yourself from tricky situations. Heavily showcased in the demo, in the game proper use of bullet time will be limited.

The other notable element is the acumen with which the game appears to have been developed, in that you have to use your brain in order to get out of the situations you find yourself landing in. And in this climate, intelligent development is a precious approach. A PS2 version is being developed by Rockstar Canada, due out this winter.

Republic







- Format: **PC**
- Publisher: **Eidos**
- Developer: **Elixir Studios**



The last resort: have your faction-threatening opponents eliminated, by all means. But only if you know you can handle the inevitable consequences

Power is control, and in *Republic* you obtain control by influencing the populace to join your faction. This you can do in several ways and it's up to you to intelligently obtain all of the remarkable amount of information at your disposal. Of course, you'll have enemies and individuals who represent a threat. Is a priest on his soapbox in the middle of park slowly drawing a crowd partially made up of your faction members? You could always bribe him, of course. If that doesn't work, why not send someone to shake him up a little? Ultimately, you could always have him shot. But beware, every action has a reaction.

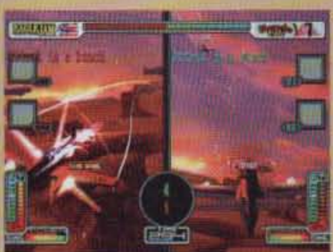
Furthermore, to stop players cheating by behaving erratically and irresponsibly, Elixir has included a Faction Ideology menu, which keeps a record of characteristics such as religion, violence, and morality, among others. Contradictory actions eventually ensure you lose followers once people stop trusting you.

It's massively complex and, crucially, is still one of the most striking-looking PC games ever.

Propeller Arena







- Format: **Dreamcast**
- Publisher: **Sega**
- Developer: **In-house (AM2)**



Being an AM2 title, it's cheese rawk all the way as you dogfight with up to five opponents. Forget the music, though: this is all about arcade action

Sega is continuing to squeeze some online gaming juice out of its 128bit platform with this, one of its few high-profile new Dreamcast titles to make an appearance at E3.

In online mode you face up to five other human opponents in what can only be described as an arcade-like spin on the flight sim genre. Power-ups litter the playing space, outrageous manoeuvres can be pulled off with ease, and the entire experience is wrapped up with the kind of accessibility for which AM2 is renowned (*F355* excepted).

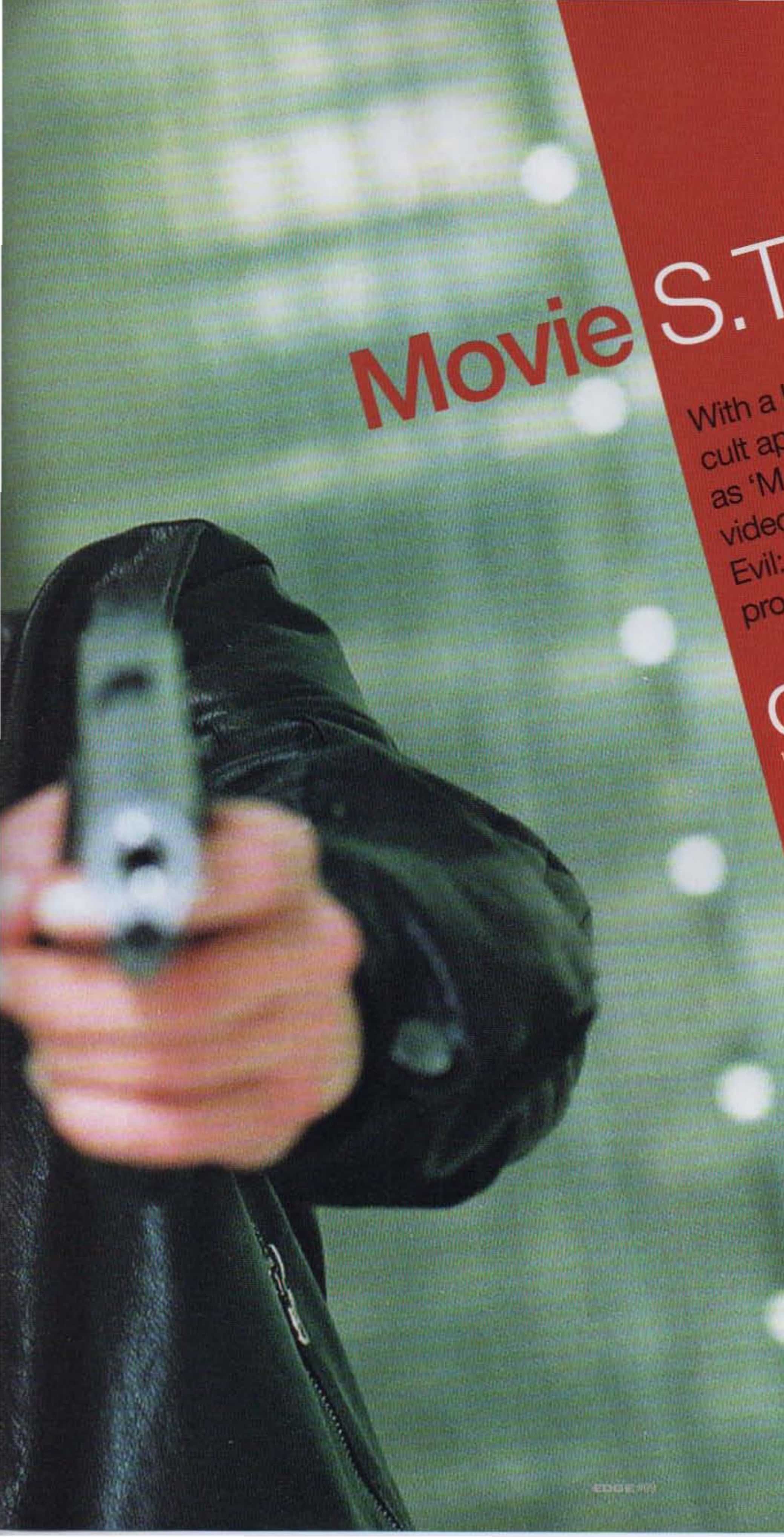
Sega's Dreamcast microphone peripheral has been criminally underused, but it is a fundamental element of *Propeller Arena* as you goad opponents and even make contact with human wingmen in a teamplay scenario.

Offline, a splitscreen multiplayer mode goes some way towards adding longevity, but this is very much an online-centric title: the simplistic gameplay lends itself perfectly to such playing conditions.

Expect an August launch.



Photography: Constantin Film



Movie S.T.A.R.S.

With a leading lady who oozes cult appeal, the same director as 'Mortal Kombat', and a top videogame licence, 'Resident Evil: Ground Zero' is an intriguing prospect. Edge finds out more…

Oh dear. The synopsis for 'Resident Evil: Ground Zero' that has been made available to the press is depressingly brief. And in the tightly controlled world of celluloid, a set visit to a film centring around surprise and lurking horrors is unlikely to illuminate much. Fortunately, the driver supplied by the production company to take **Edge** to the location shoot appears blissfully unaware of his passenger's occupation.

"Yeah, well, the main source of evil in the film is a nine-foot-tall mutant with half its brain exposed and a long animatronic tongue," he explains enthusiastically. **Edge**'s note pad is already out. "The STARS team are stalked through the whole film by this thing. It just gets bigger and bigger. Plot? Yeah, well, there's this super-computer called the Red Queen. It activates all the emergency systems. I shouldn't really tell you this, but the bad guy steals a vial of the T-virus and tosses it into the base. The halon systems come on. The oxygen disappears. Everyone in the base dies, but is then brought back to life through the virus." The driver pauses, clearly perturbed by the scribbling he can









Undead dogs will make an appearance in the film. Although unlikely to mimic the most memorable scene from *Resident Evil* (above), KY Jelly-smeared, bulked-up Dobermans will hunt Alice down

Alice begins her *Resident Evil* experience with no memory or weapons. Flashbacks will reveal the darker side of her character as the film progresses, while the addition of a rocket launcher to her arsenal is promised for the final confrontation

hear. "So, what are you here for, anyway?" The rest of the journey continues in silence.

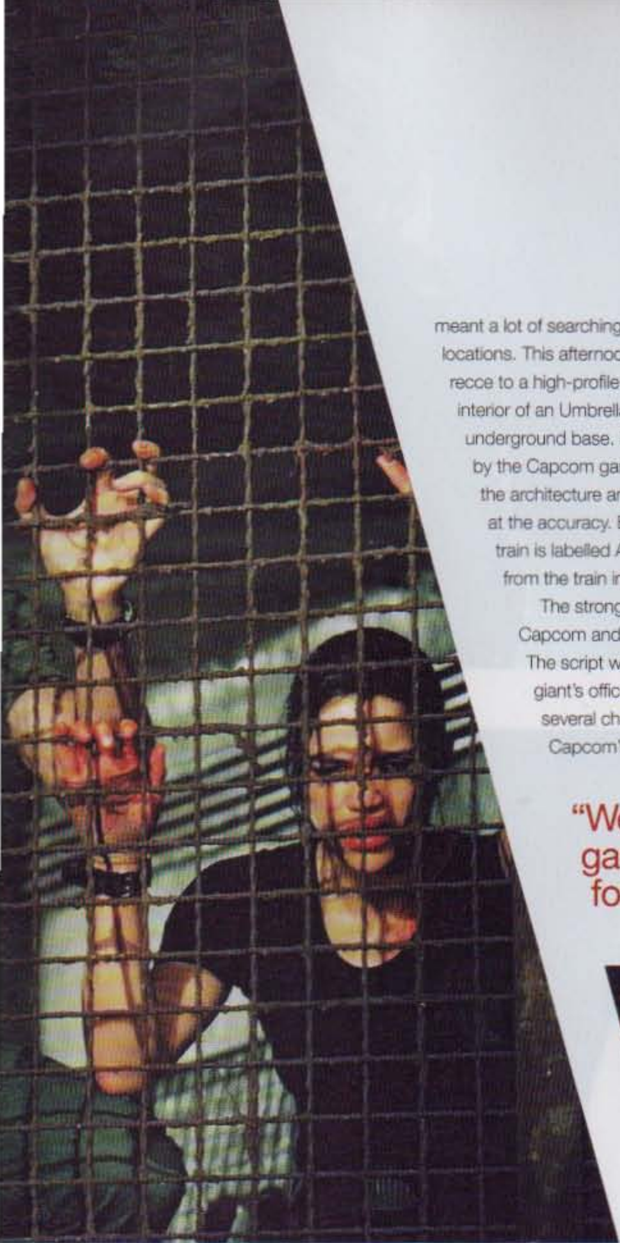
It's an good start, but in truth, concerns about non-disclosure prove unfounded. The crew behind the forthcoming *Resident Evil* film are in relaxed and open mood. They are decamping from a dark underground location in the heart of Berlin's concrete landscape. The stampede to the nearby white marquee can signify only one thing: lunch. It's a bizarre introduction to this new *Resident Evil* universe. Members of the Special Tactics And Rescue Squad are standing in line at the lunch queue. **Paul Anderson**, the film's writer/director, is nearby discussing the workings of the mind of a twelve year old. While by her caravan, to the strains of an Eastern European pop tune, **Milla Jovovich** is dancing in the midday sun.

There is little to highlight the terror of Capcom's survival horror franchise. Indeed, while some commentators are only too happy to maintain direct links between the videogame and movie industries, a truly astounding adaptation of a videogame has yet to be made. As if to assuage such doubts, Anderson takes time out from lunch to outline his vision. "Our approach to the movie was to stay within the universe but treat it as if it were another game," he begins. "I spent six months playing *Resident Evil: The Director's Cut* and just thought this was fantastic."

The story so far…

Anderson is absurdly laid-back. His unkempt hair and vivid orange T-shirt give the 36-year-old the appearance of a much younger man. Against expectations, he is happy to provide the plot to what will effectively be the opening chapter of the *Resident Evil* story: "It takes place several months before the first *Resident Evil* game. The Umbrella Corporation is still the villain and we will use a lot of the same creatures that are in the games. Milla plays Alice, a caretaker in the mansion above Umbrella corp. In an early scene she is taking a shower and is knocked out by nerve gas. This causes her to lose her memory, and during the film she gets flashbacks at stressful moments. The gas is triggered by the Red Queen, which is the computer controlling all the systems within the Hive – Umbrella's base beneath the mansion. The STARS team are called in to investigate and shut down the Red Queen."

Anderson is called away, but the German PR representatives sent to man-mark **Edge** ensure that a replacement is found to continue the pitch. **Robert Kulzer**, the film's executive producer, takes over. "We really wanted to maintain the look of the games," he begins. "This



meant a lot of searching around for ideal locations. This afternoon I'm going on a recce to a high-profile bank. It will be an interior of an Umbrella office deep in the underground base. Everything is inspired by the Capcom games. You will see all the architecture and you will be amazed at the accuracy. Even the front of the train is labelled Alexi 5000. It's straight from the train in *Resident Evil 2*."

The strong relationship between Capcom and Impact Films is significant. The script was taken to the videogame giant's offices in Japan for approval and several changes were made. Though Capcom's forthcoming *Resident Evil: Zero* was well under development before Anderson's project, there will be loose connections between the videogame and the movie. In the future, however, Anderson would like to develop a sequel which more accurately shadows Capcom's next *Resident Evil* title. The director hopes that such a bond could become a powerful film-making model, encouraging authentic adaptations of videogames rather than superficial translations for the masses. Certainly, Impact's insistence on accurate interiors from Capcom's universe is encouraging.

In terms of mood and location the film will be modelled around the first *Resident Evil*. Kulzer compares it to the slow build-up of tension generated in the first game, rather than *Resident Evil 2*'s schlock-horror action. "Ultimately, our characters end up trapped half a mile underground," he discloses. "They have one gun, a spare magazine and 526 zombies… plus assorted other things. So there's no way they can blast their way out. They have to be smart."



The main threat in the movie will come from a Licker-like creature. It will grow and deform over the course of the film, becoming ever stronger. The crew refer to the animatronic creature as 'Clint'

"We really wanted to maintain the look of the games. This meant a lot of searching around for ideal locations… you will be amazed"





As if on cue, the lunch call is over and the cast and crew shamble back into the darkness of the nearby concrete tunnel. **Edge** is guided down into what, it transpires, is a partly constructed subway. Beyond the mess of wires, monitors, and arc lights lies Umbrella's secret underground station. Silver crates and boxes line the platform, while fluorescent 'loading bay' signs, complete with Umbrella logos, hang from the ceiling. Filming is already underway, and a black train with a cyclopean headlight appears from a distant tunnel and draws up to the station platform. Tentatively, members of the STARS team slide back the cargo door and file out. They train their automatic weapons on unseen assailants, with the exception of the last two who carry between them a mysterious wooden crate. Then Alice appears, replete with a long, narrow red dress. It's cold and dark down here. A multitude of lurking horrors can be imagined. She looks suitably terrified.

It is only a snapshot of what the film is



to deliver, but the level of detail is promising. Anderson, though, is unhappy with the take. The train is hauled back to its start location, the lights are dimmed and action is called again. During the afternoon the scene is taken countless times. Anderson's perfectionism is stringent, and soon a routine of action and inaction emerges. Michelle Rodriguez (the tough cookie from 'Girlfight'), who plays nails STARS member Rain, becomes tetchy. Jovovich dons a grubby bathrobe to keep out the cold. Other STARS members take intermittent fag breaks by the metal drums which are, presumably, full of biological waste.

Milla: what a trooper

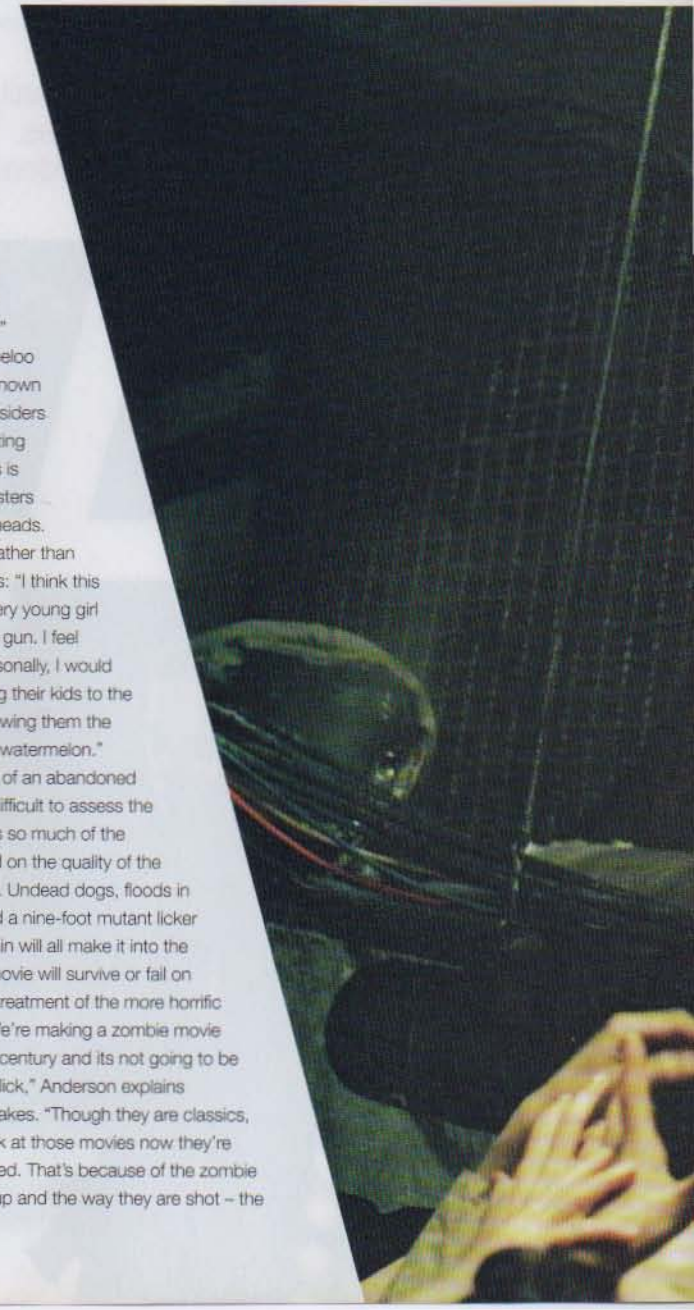
However, Jovovich is used to the gruelling schedule. At one point she nonchalantly wanders over, lights a cigarette and discusses some of the more punishing scenes. "It gets harder and harder," she remarks. "From a videogame perspective the first few weeks were like the easy level, and then it got a little harder until two weeks ago we were in the flooded lab. It was freezing and I was wearing this little dress – and it's half ripped off and soaking wet."

She sees the lab scene as a pivotal moment in the film. "In the flooded lab we are looking for the anti-virus. One of the members of the team gets his memory back and betrays us. He escapes the lab and locks us in, but there are creatures outside trying to get in. The lab was hard. I had to dunk myself 30 times a day to match continuity. But for audiences this thing is going to be amazing, because you have this really strong girl dripping wet in a little dress fighting for her life."

"For audiences this is going to be amazing, because you have this really strong girl dripping wet in a little dress fighting for her life"

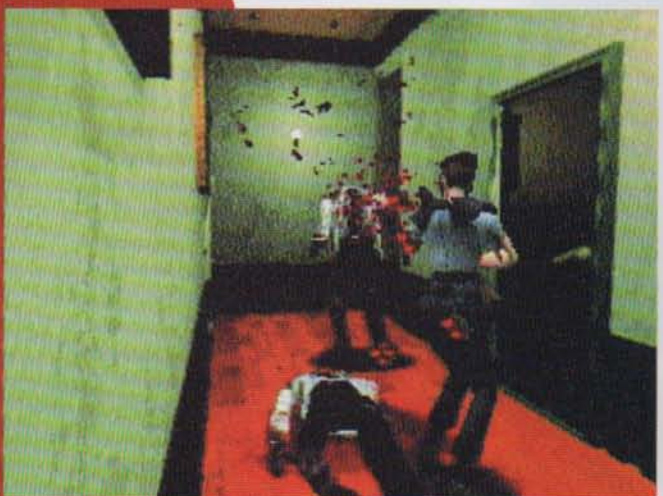
Having played Joan of Arc and Leeloo in 'The Fifth Element', Jovovich is known for her strong characters. She considers Alice as a woman capable of fighting demons – but maintains that this is merely a metaphor for the monsters which we all must fight in our heads. She sees Alice as a positive rather than a negative role model for girls: "I think this film is for young people. Every young girl should know how to use a gun. I feel confident with a gun. Personally, I would love to see parents taking their kids to the shooting range and showing them the effects a gun has on a watermelon."

In the cold depths of an abandoned subway station it is difficult to assess the movie's potential, as so much of the tension will depend on the quality of the action sequences. Undead dogs, floods in science labs, and a nine-foot mutant licker attacking the train will all make it into the final cut. The movie will survive or fail on the director's treatment of the more horrific elements. "We're making a zombie movie for the 21st century and its not going to be a Romero flick," Anderson explains between takes. "Though they are classics, if you look at those movies now they're very dated. That's because of the zombie make-up and the way they are shot – the





The director is undaunted by the possibility of the film receiving an '18' certificate. The bloody decapitation of zombies could prove a main feature



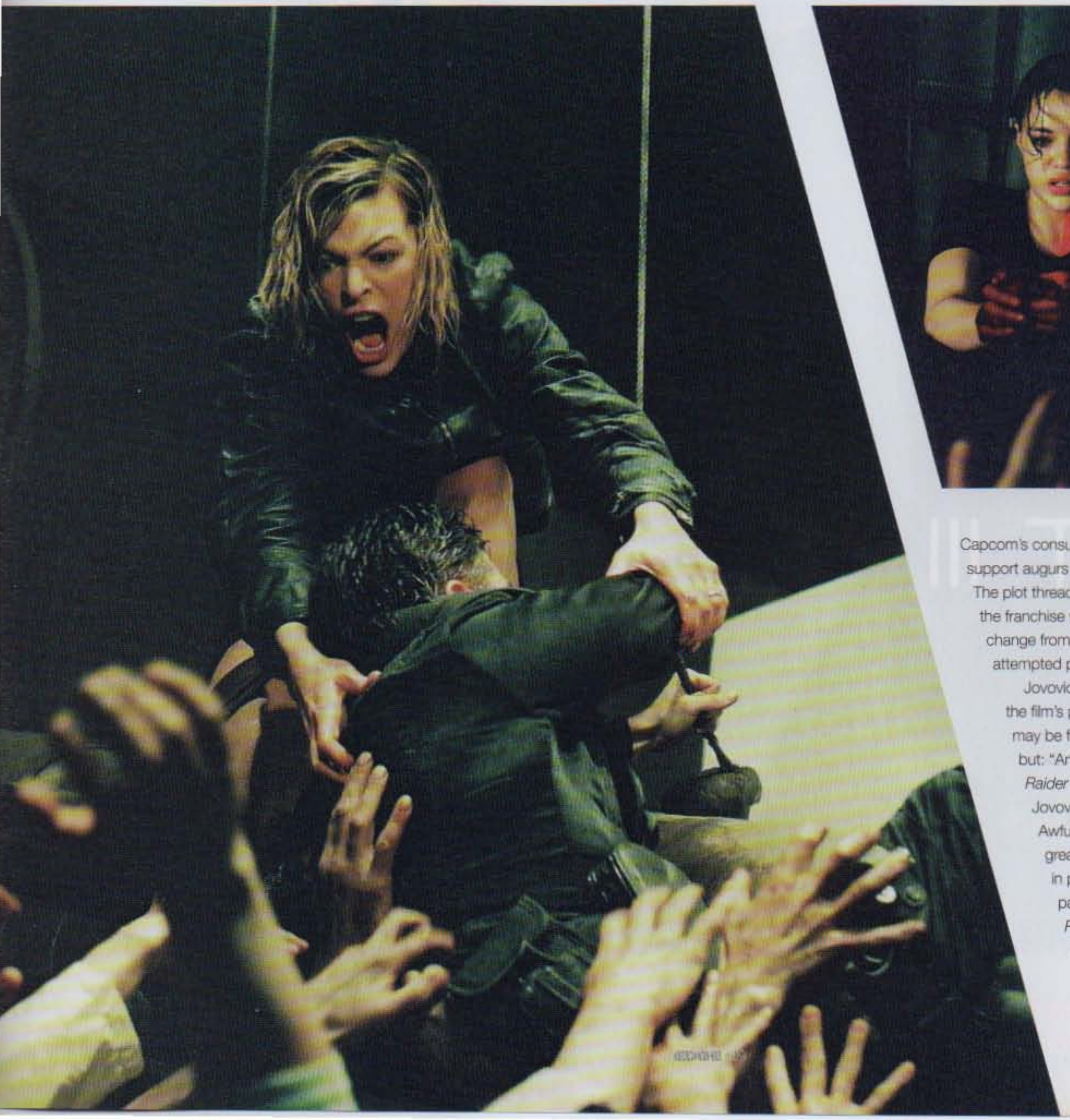
very flat lighting. It's one of the reasons why those movies have become comedic. Eventually you see too much of the zombies and they become laughable. That's not the case in the games. The games are very scary, and the zombies are very scary throughout. The look of the zombies is something we're really concerned about. We're using a lot of computer-generated images and animatronics – the whole range of visual effects as well as make-up."

Going beyond the game

Criticism across the Net, culminating in a petition to have the film canned, has failed to dampen the spirits of the production team. Indeed, Anderson finds such loyalty misplaced: "The acting in the first *Resident Evil* was the worst and the dialogue was really bad. When Capcom do a new game they don't go: 'Right we're going to re-do *Resident Evil* one'. I speak as a gamer. If all I'm seeing from the movie is the first game with all the bad dialogue transposed onto film then that's not a very good film experience for me. Why would I want to pay £7 to see that?"

'Resident Evil: Ground Zero' has been in gestation for several years. The film was first optioned soon after Capcom's original game hit the shelves. Both 'Romper Stomper' director Geoffrey Wright and George Romero made bids to turn videogame into movie, but their scripts were rejected. Though Anderson's previous videogame movie 'Mortal Kombat' hardly inspires confidence,

Anderson hopes to avoid the comedic effect associated with 'classic' zombie flicks through use of lighting and sophisticated CG techniques. Images released so far hint at a minimalist approach to make-up. Hopefully post-production work will enhance the Nutella-inspired weeping sores





Capcom's consultancy and continued support augurs well for his new venture. The plot threads and themes inspired by the franchise will also make a welcome change from spurious game adaptations attempted previously.

Jovovich is similarly optimistic about the film's potential. Lara Croft's film vehicle may be fuelled by more cash and hype, but: "Any real fan will tell you that *Tomb Raider* is bubblegum," concludes Jovovich. "*Resident Evil* is horrible stuff. Awful, violent, bloody, gory… and it's great. I just hope Paul doesn't fuck it up in post production." **Edge** also hopes her passion is rewarded with a terrifying movie. *Resident Evil* fans can find out if the film reanimates the old-skool zombie flick and ushers in a new era for quality videogame adaptations when it goes on general release in summer 2002.

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Broadly speaking, scores correspond to the following sentiments: one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Videogames on the Edge

This month's unanimous choices...

Alien Resurrection

Not quite *Halo* in terms of crisp visuals, but next-gen FPS developers would do well to take a leaf out of Argonaut's atmospherically terrifying grimoire.



(PS) Fox Interactive

Dancing Stage Euromix

Dancing alone to Gloria Gaynor, half-empty bottle of wine by the TV and tears dripping on the mat. It might sound sad, but it's just another day for one staffer.



(PS) Konami

Operation Flashpoint

Sleep might provide some physical respite, but in **Edge**'s head, the war never stops. If the team ever gets called up, expect cowardice par excellence.



(PC) Codemasters

TimeSplitters

Go into the map editor. Create the most basic room possible. Then put in a few rocket launchers. Undiluted mayhem in minutes.



(PS2) Eidos

Loading pains

When seconds feel like hours

Edge hates awkward pauses. When developers and their PR people arrive at the office to demo their latest pride and joy, there's nothing quite like the silence as a yellow loading bar creeps slowly across the screen. "Heh... nearly... there," mumbles a nervous project leader. Waiting for the next level to load in whatever you're playing at home might be frustrating and tedious, but at least it isn't embarrassing. Loading textures, loading sounds, loading structure: everything's detailed, everything's dull. Time stretches, and **Edge** watches the inexorable progress of the status meter.

With Nintendo's decision to drop solid-state media, loading times are no longer something the impatient gamer can opt out of. Hard disks for XBox and PlayStation2 may ease the problem somewhat, but the PC example suggests that it'll simply encourage developers to produce fatter code in the first place. So, it looks as though gamers may be stuck with attention-sapping game-access times, and **Edge** seems doomed to devco smalltalk for what feels like forever.

It's tempting to reminisce about Namco's glorious time-destroying minigames. *Ridge Racer* gave you *Galaxian*, *Tekken* had *Galaga*, and everything turned on its head: you started looking forward to the loading times. But this has spawned few imitators, and you have to wonder why. It's a simple thing to do, and in a world where idle hands turn all too quickly to train-wide sonic irritations in the form of mobile phone *Snake*, it's not like it's particularly difficult to entertain the bored.

Unfortunately, the minigame route couldn't save something like *Red Faction* (below), and that's not just because snapping from FPS immersion to throwaway frivolity would detract from the game's coherence, either. The problem with Volition's work lies not in the length of the loading times, but their incomprehensible positioning. Experience has taught gamers to expect an access pause when they enter a lift, but not when they're running full speed down a seemingly innocuous corridor. It's a shockingly unsubtle oversight that's much more than the minor irritation Volition might have hoped.

Red Faction's creator may blame the structure on the limitations of PlayStation2 hardware, but it has no right to. Everyone knows texture memory's a problem on Sony's machine, so it can't have come as a surprise. Games must be designed with the weaknesses of their hosts in mind, and if they're not, then they can hardly complain when things get awkward.





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Gran Turismo 3: A-spec

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEI** Developer: **Polyphony Digital Inc** Price: **¥6,800 (£40)** Release: **Out now (Japan) July 27 (UK)**









Lamborghini cleverly appears as a Japanese-run Diablo GT (top), the Rally modes are as playable as ever, and oil changes helps performance (above)

Revs are kept at a steady 7,000rpm. The five red lights ahead of the grid predictably give way to green and the turbo does its job of propelling you into triple figures in a scandalously economic collection of seconds, wonderfully wheezing its way to the components' mechanical limit before every upward gear change. And then it's straight onto the brakes and back down the transmission before the track's first apex is clipped. The tyres screech as they struggle for grip, the back end snakes around menacingly, but a little mid-corner acceleration soon settles things down. Then it's on to the next bend. And the next. Lap after lap, circuit after circuit. Of course, you've travelled this Tarmac before. A similar, albeit cruder, background has previously swept past you. And you've certainly already battled against these automotive opponents.

Only it's never felt this rewarding.

Following the two previous *Gran Turismos* was never going to be easy, of course. On the one hand, aficionados demanded a 128bit version of an experience they knew intimately. On the other, many would look at the title expecting a blueprint for the racing genre's next generation. After all, its predecessors had set the standard for structure, content, realism, and handling dynamics in a mix that, at the time of the 1997 original at least, proved revolutionary.

But, as happens to many revolutionaries, *GT3* has calmed down somewhat in its latter years. Granted, in visual terms, the game is still very much firing on more cylinders than the competition (even if *Metropolis Street Racer* can occasionally give it a run for its money). The physics model, too, remains ahead of pursuers. Now operating at twice the number of frames per second than Polyphony's last digital driving venture, it feels far more immediate, responsive, and, crucially, predictable. Forget the sudden, unexpected mid-corner 180° spins that occasionally plagued the more adventurous *GT2* driver – here, if the rear end misbehaves you'll not only feel it sooner, but your correctional input also has a more rapid effect. In terms of balancing playability and authenticity, Polyphony has yet to be joined on the top podium.

You've travelled this Tarmac. The background has swept past you before. You've battled these opponents. Only it's never felt this rewarding



One of *GT3*'s 'surprises' is the inclusion of F1 cars. Though not officially licensed, F1 followers should easily recognise them (eg Senna's 1985 Lotus Renault, right). Just don't expect them in the PAL version

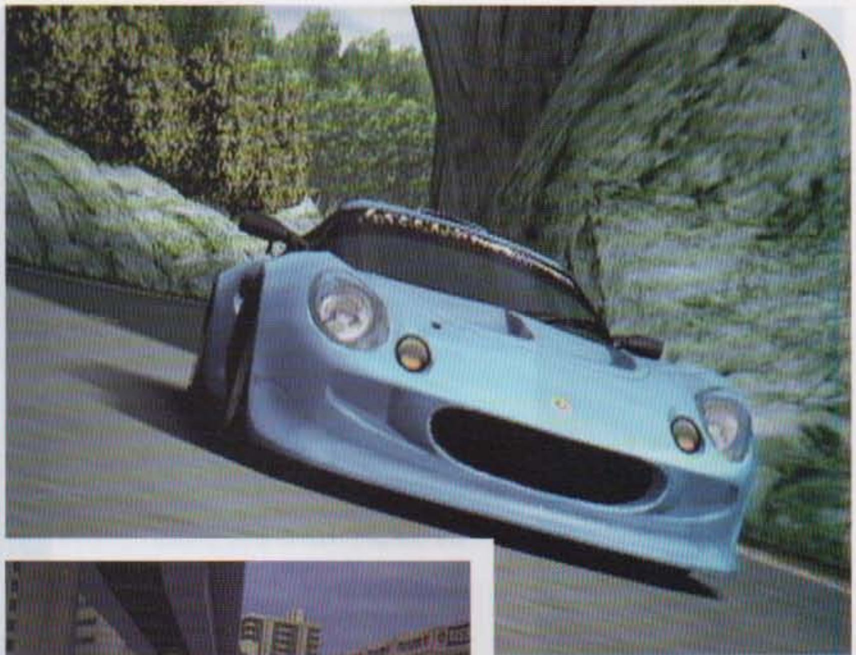
In terms of fresh content, however, *GT3* ranks somewhere further down the placings. Only four circuits will be new to previous *GT* owners: Tokyo 246, a fast drive around Akasaka's wide streets, a central area of the Japanese capital where you'll find SCEI's headquarters; Swiss Alps, a decent – if unremarkable – rally track; Complex String, a massive – and excellent – test track; and Côte D'Azur, the Monaco GP circuit familiar to any F1 game player.

Naturally, there are other changes affecting familiarity. Gone are the second-hand vehicles, and *GT2*'s 600-odd models have been streamlined to something nearer the 150 mark. While this has removed most of the milk floats found in that game, it has also taken out some massively influential and much-loved European hot hatches (a slight line-up adjustment may be made for the PAL release). Still, as a result things are far more digestible if somewhat harder – progression takes substantially longer than in previous iterations of the game. Perhaps realising this, Polyphony has removed the BHP limit found in *GT2*'s race meetings that thwarted cheats as a way of balancing matters, although the price of the tuning components appears to have been altered accordingly. The race series themselves are split into five categories (beginner, amateur, professional, rally, and endurance), with compulsive tyre wear coming into play in anything other than the beginner and rally meetings, again making things trickier.

In terms of disappointments, the AI stands out as the biggest culprit, seemingly unashamed by its noticeably scripted nature. And more so than in the previous *GT* games, the lack of damage is now a major issue – given the graphical realism, bouncing off











An anamorphic option will delight 16:9 TV owners, a ghost car in license tests makes life much easier, and overall menus are more visual, making it simpler to navigate your way around

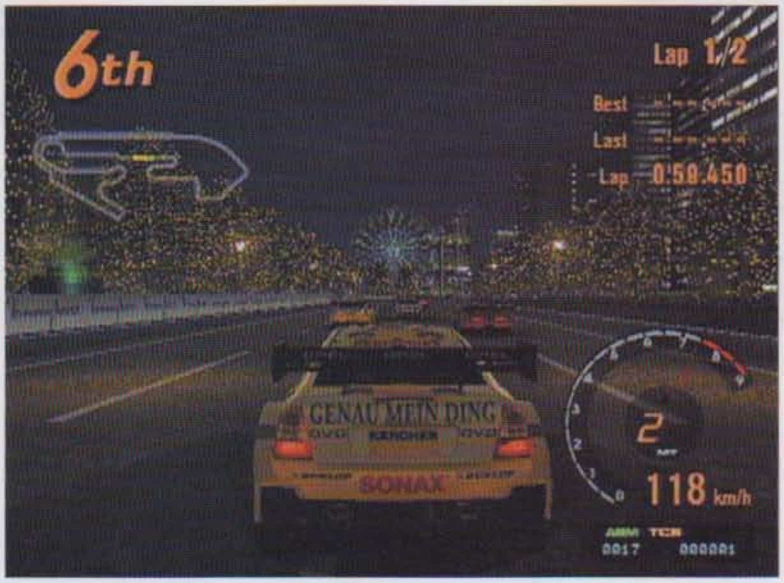
The characteristics of a wet track are beautifully conveyed in the rain-soaked Route 5 circuit (top)

other cars or walls without perceptible visual bodywork mutilation looks odd (see box). By today's standards, both feel offensively out of place in a game of this calibre.

Thankfully, then, *GT3* strikes back with superb force-feedback wheel support to significantly improve playability, and a magnificent sixplayer iLink option, the latter negating the AI aspects mentioned above, and offering a remarkable racing experience.

True, there are better racing games out there. The PlayStation's *TOCA WTC*, with its excellent AI routines, and *Le Mans* on DC come to mind as superior all-out racing affairs. But the essence of the *GT* world has always been to take a car and its driver to the limit of their ability, rather than racing alone. And in this respect, *GT3* truly refines this experience.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten



While the Gran Turismo mode is the main game, the Arcade option also offers an involving structure and the usual goodies bonuses act as an incentive. The bulb-strewn trees of Route 11 are magnificent (above)



Damaging issue

You'd have thought the *GT* franchise's success would allow Polyphony/SCE to dictate the terms for a car manufacturer's inclusion in a *GT* game. After all, Aston Martin has publicly said how instrumental *GT2* was in promoting the marque in the US, and **Edge** received a letter from Nissan UK, detailing how many people now recognised its Skyline GT-R from playing *Gran Turismo*. Realtime damage is rapidly becoming a necessity in driving games due to the positive gameplay implications it brings. XBox's *Project Gotham* features real cars with real damage. SCE take note.

Alone In The Dark: The New Nightmare

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **Infogrames** Developer: **Darkworks** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**









In traditional fashion, objects can be pushed to reveal doorways or highlight clues. Mirrors often operate as hidden doorways to dark passageways

Review code arriving several days after a title is already in the shops – as this did – never bodes well. Lurking bugs and glitchy code were expected, but *Alone In The Dark: The New Nightmare* emerges as a more than competent title. Granted, there are control issues, but these don't really undermine the imagination and atmosphere Darkworks has added to the survival horror formula.

Those familiar with the mythos of HP Lovecraft will instantly recognise the scenario. Diabolical experiments, ancient artifacts, cabalistic symbols, and hideously deformed monsters serve as the backdrop to the explorations of the two selectable characters: an ethnology professor (Aline) and a private detective (Carnby). The plot is typically convoluted, and isn't helped by some truly risible voice acting (will things ever change?). Uncovering plot threads from journals and diaries adds some narrative texture to the cutscenes, and is a necessity if vital clues are to be found.

In truth, *The New Nightmare* is a rich brew which borrows as heavily from Capcom's *Resident Evil* games as it does from the previous three titles in the series. The control and combat elements are modelled directly from *Resident Evil*, even going so far as to copy the same auto-aim shoulder button and inventory menus – but the implementation is far less polished. Both characters adopt the *Resident Evil* control dynamic, but movement is far less smooth, and attempting to target fast-moving enemies with a character that's difficult to position soon becomes irritating.

Thankfully, Darkworks hasn't succumbed to a safe approach to puzzle implementation.

In truth, *The New Nightmare* is a rich brew which borrows as heavily from Capcom's *Resident Evil* as the previous three *Alone* titles

Yes, there are a number of keys to find and doors to unlock, but the title's most distinctive feature is that it asks the player to stop and consider the options rather than just ferry objects from one location to another. Vital clues can appear in photographs, be heard on dictaphone messages, or even seen through the lens of a telescope. The challenging problems may not offer a comfortable route through the game, but they ensure that the pleasure



Aline and Carnby meet at key points throughout the game and exchange information. A walkie-talkie keeps them in constant contact and the occasional clue can be gleaned from these communications

is greatly enhanced when the player managed to unlock new areas.

A good deal of *The New Nightmare's* charm derives from the beautifully implemented lighting effects, which become a vital gameplay component. Torchlight can reveal hidden objects, will scare away certain creatures, and is required in order to solve several puzzles in the game. Once in the mansion, light switches can be used to rid rooms of foul creatures. Occasionally, and without warning, menacing shadows form out of the blackness to dismay the player. Often, these are just devices to create tension, but periodically such shadows form into creatures intent on your destruction.

Though hardly revolutionary, the ability to choose between two characters also adds some depth to the proceedings. Aline and Carnby can contact each other via walkie-talkie, and clues can be gleaned from these conversations. The manner in which narrative threads interweave is cleverly done, and there are enough fresh puzzles and locations to keep the player interested for the second playthrough as the other character

The usual irritations associated with survival horror games remain, however. There is plenty of backtracking over well-worn ground, ammunition must be carefully conserved against the hordes of respawning monsters, and the 'X' button will come in for severe wear after being pressed next to every piece of scenery in the game to locate hidden objects. So while *The New Nightmare* isn't the most startling adventure title to appear in recent years, its emphasis on genuinely imaginative puzzles combined with beautifully rendered locations breathes some life into a tired genre.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten











Objects glint in the dark when the torchlight falls on them. While this makes finding key items easier there are still many supplies which must be located by pressing 'X' next to everything







The monsters in the game are not nearly as impressive as those experienced in the *Resident Evil* series. Running into diabolical creatures can still prove to be an unnerving experience, but cleverly the torch often keeps them at bay until an exit is found or weapon loaded. Respawning means that ammo must be conserved



Warning: spoiler

It is heartening to find imaginatively designed problems in a console adventure game. Though some require deliberation, they never become as illogical as merging a hat with a sandwich, or some other ridiculous combination. Clues can be collected from a variety of sources ranging from the use of a telescope (above) to revealing hidden messages on walls with a fluorescent torch lens.

Startopia

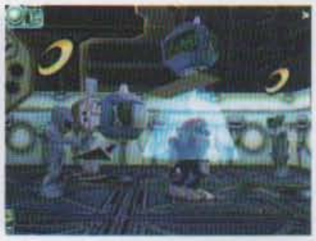
Format: PC Publisher: Eidos Developer: Mucky Foot Price: £30 Release: Out now

Startopia needs your love. Love it. Witness the game's introduction, which sees an ape at the dawn of history encounter a towering monolith. The monolith dispenses a doughnut; the ape bites the doughnut; the ape grins; the ape hurls the doughnut skywards where it hangs, spiralling, and fades into a torus-shaped space station. Because the space station looks like a doughnut, doesn't it? Get it? Please love it.

Startopia doesn't provide instant thrills. The risk/reward structure of the game is about steady progress, and so is suited to PC gamers







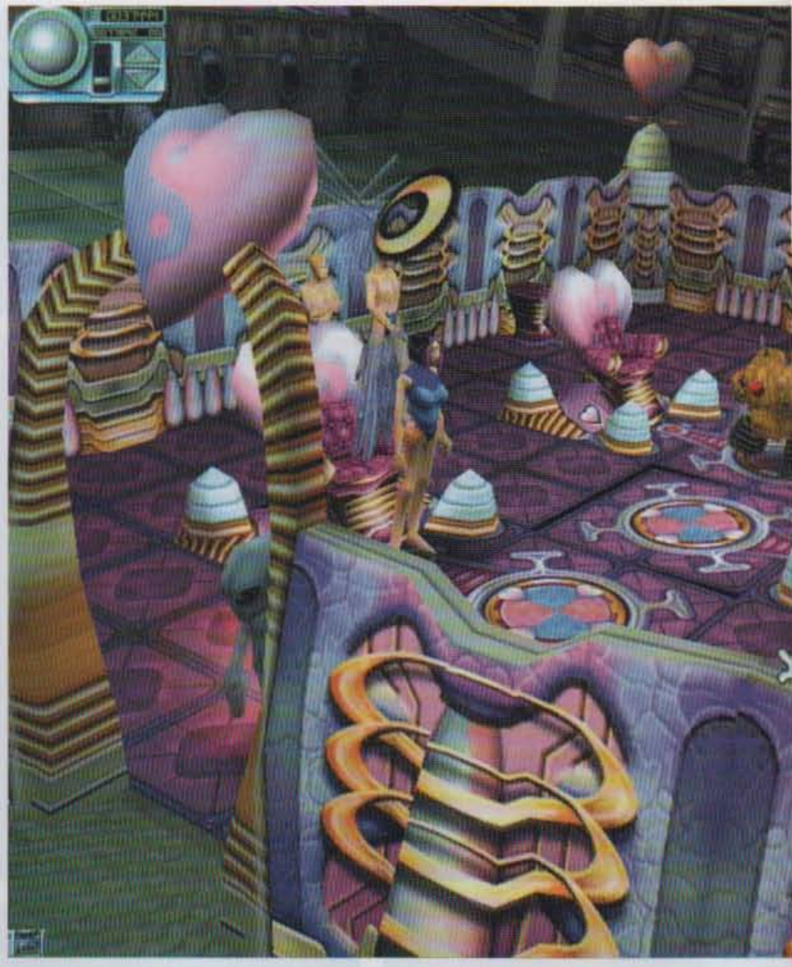


Every character aboard the space station has a name, a brief history, and a list of personality traits. Some make good employees; others will excel at slacking

It may be amusing, but it's so, so irrelevant, and so, so indicative of Mucky Foot's introspective outlook. Prospective consumers of *Startopia* should note that their money isn't just being exchanged for a game that slips comfortably into the build-and-balance mould, a genre brought into the mainstream by *Sim City* in 1989. When someone buys *Startopia*, they're buying into three years' worth of geek enthusiasm. They're buying every creature, every scripted moment, and every random encounter – a playset of miniature aliens. In some ways, the game structure is almost secondary; *Startopia*'s creatures are mail-order Sea Monkeys for 2001, but they're much less disappointing.

There are 12 missions that come with the game, finite scenarios that serve as appetisers for lengthier contests. Each level concentrates on an example of tactics open to station tenants, and introduces the skills of the disparate races. As a soothing, well-curved preface to the greater complications *Startopia* offers in Sandbox or multiplayer mode, it works well, and it's made more than just a training section thanks to some excellent presentation. It's all framed by adequately scripted and well-delivered narration, explaining the game's nuances and setting with a familiar dry humour.

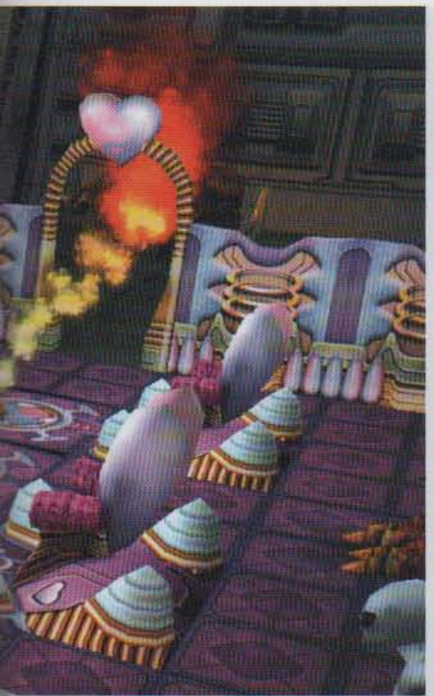
Startopia's universe will strike a chord with readers of Douglas Adams' 'Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy'. Gaming has always derived a lot from Adams' work; most attempts to imitate end up as pale copies and embarrassing failures, but it's fitting that *Startopia* uses his work as a positive inspiration. It's a difficult balance to strike, but the humour here is delicate and affecting, and is what pushes *Startopia* from complex resource management into something the majority of PC gamers will enjoy.



The middle deck is all about relaxing: love palaces will fit snugly there and allow your residents and visitors to let off steam. They have to be staffed by Sirens, a heavenly race who specialise in mind sex

That the game is suited to PC gamers ought to be stressed, since *Startopia* doesn't provide instant thrills. The risk/reward structure of the game is about steady progress, and while there are snap judgements to be made – instant trade decisions, or sporadic bursts of logical mini-RTS combat – these come as switches of pace within a dynamic that's predominantly about thinking ahead. Players must push their energy finances to the limit while always keeping something in reserve, or they'll be unable to improvise according to circumstance. Plans are made long-term, but can be wrecked by split-second hull-wrecking meteor showers, or poor trading conditions.

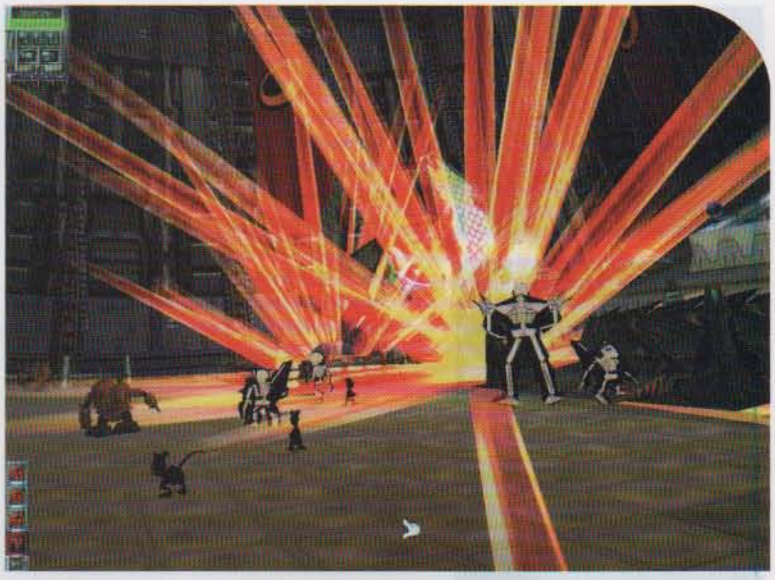
So, online battles become epic struggles, particularly when more than two people compete for control of the space station. Here lie *Startopia*'s most appealing moments: Machiavellian trade embargoes and carefully considered tag-team destruction. The sector element of the torus (see 'Battle station') comes alive at this point, and the game switches from a sprawling unfocused lesson in resource management into the natural evolution of a tabletop boardgame. Choosing which section to open next isn't just a question of where your financial priorities lie, but also











Casualties of station war must be quickly recycled, or other visitors will become upset. If the recyclers themselves have expired, then you'll have to hire more or recycle them yourself





Battle station

The space station is split into three decks and 16 radial segments, and each player begins with three of those segments to develop within. Opening an adjoining segment costs a reasonable amount of energy, which means those who expand too early will find themselves with little resources with which to exploit or defend their new are. Leave it too late, and you will relinquish territorial advantage. As with most resource-management games, gaining the upper hand becomes a question of balance and timing.

involves second-guessing the desires of your opponents. Simple decisions, maybe, but in game-design terms it's an elegant inclusion.

There's a superficial beauty to the game, too. As an aesthetic, the minutiae, verve, and cartoon gloss make *Startopia* stand out lightyears from its peers. The game itself is the culmination of years of practice, perfectly balanced and full of gleeful ideas spiral bound and vacuum-packed in claustrophobia. It doesn't break boundaries, but it does defy expectations of a genre that's conceptually progressed so little since *Sim City*, and as such it's essential for anyone who can picture their inner geek somewhere in a doughnut in space.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten





The in-game terraforming engine allows players to stretch landscapes to whatever shape they desire, and then add moisture and heat. Different environments will produce different flora and leisure opportunities

Operation Flashpoint: Cold War

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Codemasters** Developer: **Bohemia Interactive Studios** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**









As well as first- and thirdperson perspectives, *Flashpoint* enables the player to look through the accurately modelled weapon sights. Learning the meaning of the etchings will aid progress

The Operation Flashpoint of the title is a fight for freedom: a neutral island overrun by an unknown force at the height of the cold war. NATO presume it's the Russians, the Russians deny their involvement. A solid campaign structure takes you through the imaginary '85 conflict, switching the player's role through a host of combat specialist personae while maintaining a coherent storyline. This is binary war, with western freedom at risk. The stakes are high, because freedom is everything.

Taking place across three imaginary Eastern European islands, the game begins as a typical combat sim, featuring thirdperson action strategy with an emphasis on realism over simplicity. Soon it becomes much more: missions go beyond the traditional 'go here, kill this' dynamic, thanks in part to the ability to control any of the well-modelled vehicles that roam the expansive landscape. As the game progresses the tactical emphasis is increased, too, with the player assuming control of a squad. Initially, though, it's the scale that's truly impressive. These landscapes are glacial, with levels based over kilometres rather than tightly bound play areas. A valley in *Flashpoint* isn't a U-shaped collection of polygons, it's a geography lesson.

The game teaches you, too: the clever *Flashpoint* player pays attention the terrain, and carves their plans on top of the map's rigid contours. The clever *Flashpoint* player makes sure they're using every piece of that terrain to their advantage, or may find themselves stranded in open ground in plain sight of a Russian platoon. The clever *Flashpoint* player knows that using cover is crucial, since one shot can kill, or leave the player crippled – leg injuries leave soldiers crawling, arm injuries unable to aim. Though it's possible to call for a medic, if there isn't one nearby or they've already succumbed to enemy fire themselves, death is all but inevitable.

And that's been one of the criticisms. The demo release has given gamers a chance to decry the game as too tough, but complainants have missed the Czech developer's point. The greatest condemnation has been that it's too difficult to tell friend from foe, but it's meant to be that way. In real life pointing your gun at someone won't tell you where their allegiances lie. Learning the uniforms and knowing the position of your comrades will, and since that's what *Flashpoint* forces you to do, that's what will save your avatar's life. Besides, the presence of a Cadet mode, where the game provides more pointers and fantasy location aids, allows the more trigger-happy players to defy the real-life laws of combat.

The AI is unpredictably good, but while the pathfinding is generally strong, snap weaknesses occur and draw from the atmosphere. While it happens rarely, when your corporal tells you to target a Russian who, on closer inspection, appears to be 15 feet below the normally solid grass, it's a distraction and an irritant. It'll be patched, no doubt, but the game deserves better. *Flashpoint* will capture your mind. It's the sort of experience you want to show people photos of.

So take some snaps. Watch enemy helicopters cut across the sky, searchlights sweep across expanses of night-cloaked woodland; eject from a spiralling plane and end up lost in a snowstorm behind enemy lines; take in every moment of absolute immersion and one-shot fear. The detail is beautiful, the situations manifold, but they're not the essence of *Flashpoint*. That comes in the decisions – adapting to circumstance and forcing your own, open-ended action and reaction – and that's what truly stuns. Freedom is everything, and *Flashpoint* is exceptional. It's about choice, every bit as much as the brilliant *Deus Ex*, and it deserves to be as highly regarded.

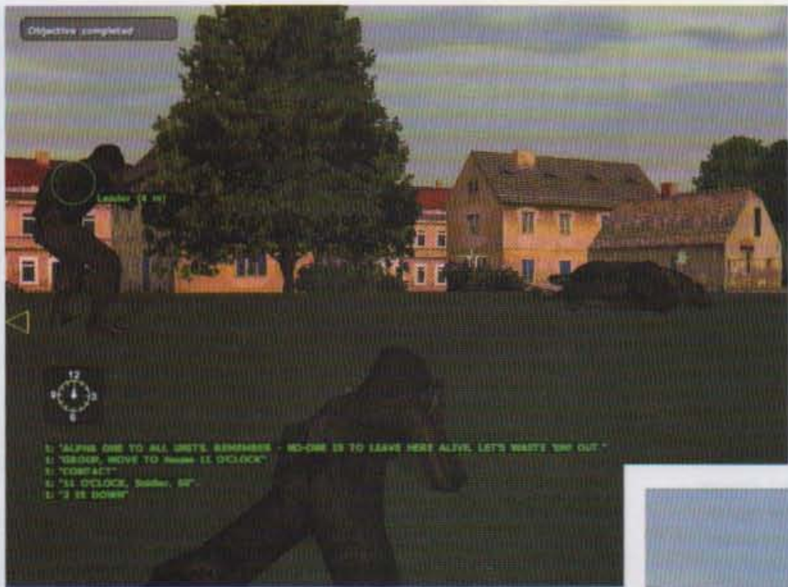


A well-placed grenade will take out a tank, but missing it will draw its attention. The lack of quicksave means if you don't get it right, there's much more at stake than in games where death just means a reload

Operation Flashpoint: Cold War will capture your mind. It's the sort of experience you want to show people photos of

Edge rating: Nine out of ten













Simple orders can be executed by selecting players with the F-keys, and then clicking on items around the screen. More complex commands involve using a radio operated through a recursive menu system



Stepping into a helicopter brings a whole new perspective to the action, and gives a good idea of just how expansive *Flashpoint*'s levels are. In multiplayer, one player can pilot and another can act as the gunner

Go your own way

It's your first mission in charge of a squad, and your commander says you'll be defending one side of a village from an imminent enemy attack. He leads you over to some bunkers to the south, and starts to advise you on the best course of action. But you don't listen; you walk away, head towards a position on a nearby hill instead. The game kicks up a message: "OK, you've decided to do your own thing. Fine." And it lets you. The Russian force arrives. You attack from the side, and you live or die on your analogue decision.



Crazy Taxi 2

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Hitmaker** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**






The Crazy Pyramid makes for a welcome respite from the overblown action of the main game. Expect the usual red thumbs, though – infuriation is a major element

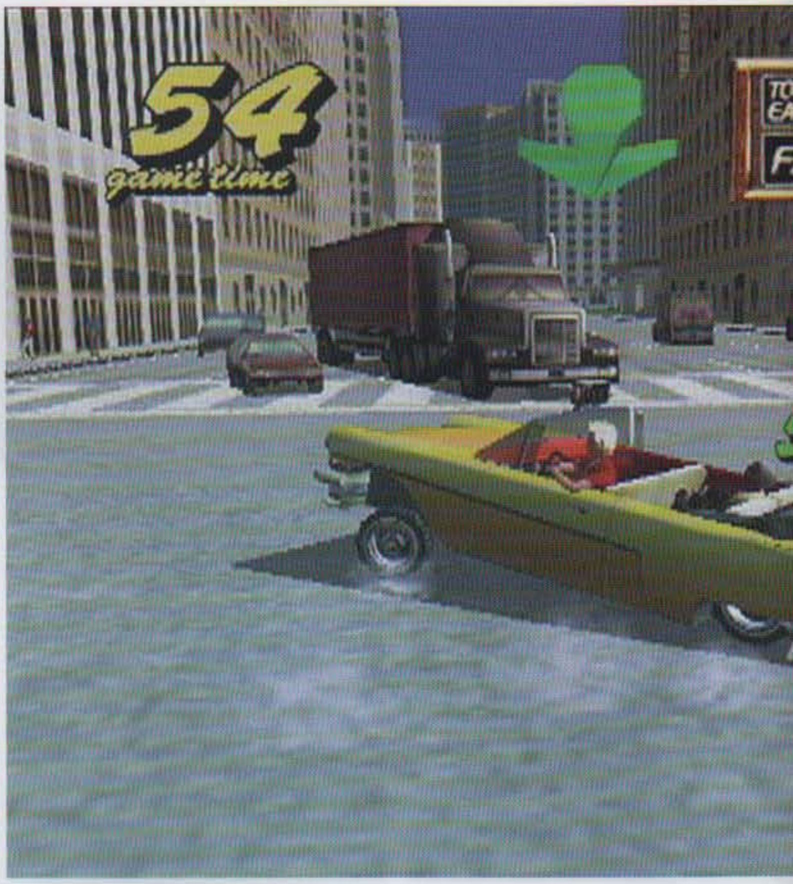
It seems that squeezing the last drops out of its most-loved franchises is as important to Sega as crafting new forms of gameplay. Hitting the streets just last year, the first episode of *Crazy Taxi* created a real buzz that is still reverberating over a year later, amply demonstrated by its recent conversion for PS2. As an exercise in unadulterated fun, the formula remains sharp enough to support minimal alteration and still deliver arcade thrills well beyond those of its nearest rivals – and this is exactly what Hitmaker has managed to deliver with *Crazy Taxi 2*.

As soon as you load up Sega's new racer, it's obvious that Hitmaker has adhered to the 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' adage, as *Crazy Taxi 2* looks identical to it's older brother – bold colours, cartoon aesthetics, and franchised landmarks included. Polygon clipping still exists, albeit to a lesser degree, and slowdown is infrequent, but bar some game engine tweaks little has changed.

This time around the action takes place in a New York-esque setting, with four new drivers and two new layouts: Around Apple and Small Apple. Maps are unlockable for each, which highlight the most requested destinations. Again, the emphasis remains firmly on speed: negotiating the metropolis as fast as possible in order to maximise fares, or tips given for particularly risky shows of driving prowess. Play in motion is undeniably engaging, and the inclusion of multiple fares adds a touch of variety, giving the player a chance to plan their route, if only to a limited degree. Back are the Crazy Dash and Drift manoeuvres, in addition to a new function – the Crazy Jump – essentially enabling the cabs to perform a bunny-hop.

In its original guise, *Crazy Taxi* would occasionally trade speed for disarray, the player bouncing around the screen, all semblance of control lost. The use of the jump irons out such chaotic occurrences, and offers an effective escape route instead – which is also neatly in line with the game's amusing bent. In fact, access to many potential customers can only be gained through the jump function, and so exploration plays a considerable part in achieving the largest rewards.

As soon as you load up Sega's new racer, it's obvious that Hitmaker has adhered to the 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' adage



Mastering the Crazy Drift is paramount for swift cornering, but it also accounts for a potential loss of control. Overdo it on a corner and you'll swap ends in an instant, wrecking any progress into the bargain

The Crazy Box mode resurfaces as Crazy Pyramid, an ever-decreasing stack of mini-games that are designed to test your driving skills. Compared to the offerings of the original, the Crazy Pyramid is a lot easier to conquer, although the final few challenges require multiple attempts before victory can be tasted. Expect to perfect a sideways drift combined with a jump; develop the ability to stop on a dime; and master the ever-so-satisfying balloon-popping routine. New inclusions utilise the jump feature, such as the ramming of an enormous golf ball – which is more fun than you'd expect. Replaying for the sheer hell of it is not an oft-seen feature in many current games, but *Crazy Taxi 2* manages to slide it into the proceedings with understated, near-nonchalant aplomb.

Despite such praise, it could be argued that *Crazy Taxi 2* falls short of being a true sequel, and ranks as more of an update, offering few new features. So while its lastability will certainly not match the likes of *GT3: A-spec*, this is simply comparing digital apples with pears: *Crazy Taxi 2* isn't a sim. It's a slice of raw arcade action that seeks to excite on the most fundamental level. Spectacularly shallow it may be, but the notion that quantity outweighs quality is naïve, especially in this instance. The arrival of the 100-hour adventure has clouded many consumers' perception of what should be the accepted lifetime for a videogame. *Crazy Taxi 2* needs make no apologies for its stance; an effortless, all-embracing title that will entertain years after the most bloated RPG has long since been abandoned. All of which is testament enough to its most valuable attribute – instant, riotous fun.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten



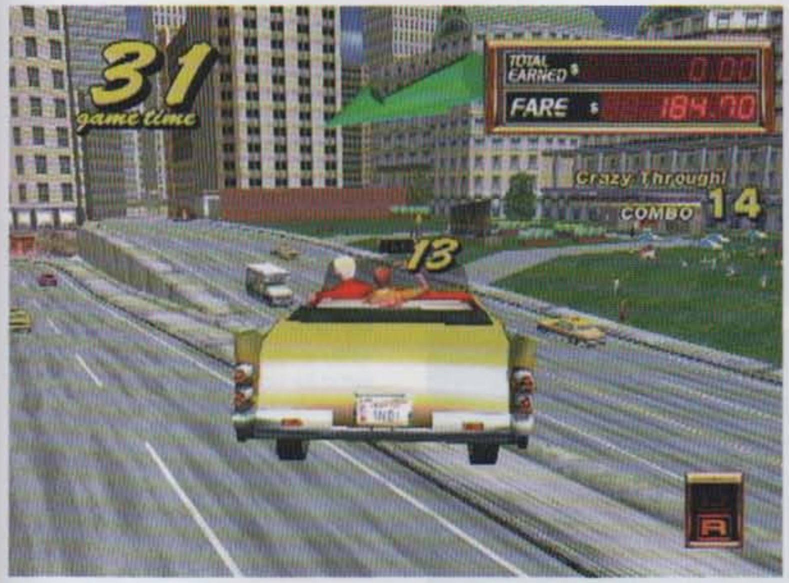








Textures are impossible to distinguish from the original outing, but the style is unmistakable. As shown above, the rickshaw resurfaces, this time under the heading of 'Lowrider'. Prepare for extreme vectors



Crazy Taxi 2's Jump function brings a large chunk of airborne travel. The temptation to continually leap every obstacle is considerable, but bear in mind, once in flight, there can be no alteration in direction

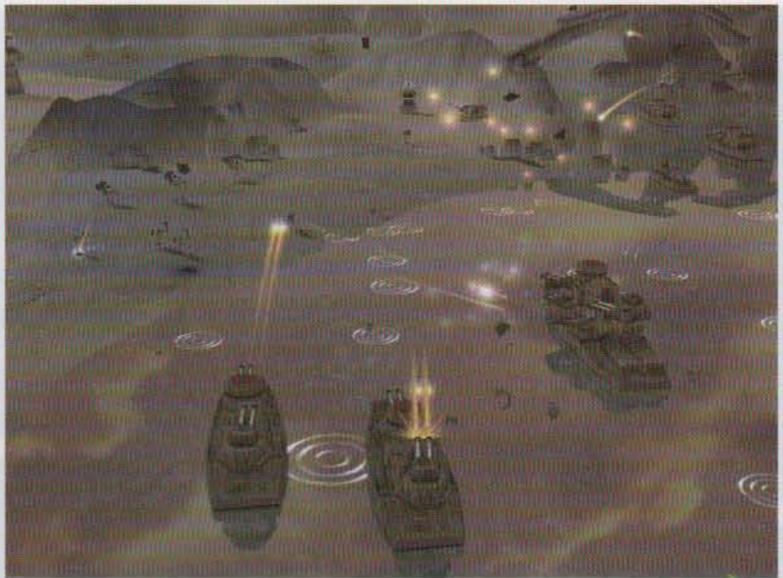
Watch and learn

An obvious but nonetheless enjoyable feature of *Crazy Taxi 2* is the replay function that allows you to record, save and replay an excerpt of mayhem starting from any point in the city. Once captured, the re-run can be viewed from a number of angles, including standard, pedestrian, firstperson and reverse. The latter is quite useless, except to observe your passenger's antics in the back seat, as they get thrown from side to side. It is worth noting that the cheat from the original game allowing the use of these angles in-game still exists. Playing in firstperson mode adds a whole new level of craziness to an already frantic game.



Z: Steel Soldiers

Format: **PC** Publisher: **EON Digital** Developer: **Bitmap Brothers** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**



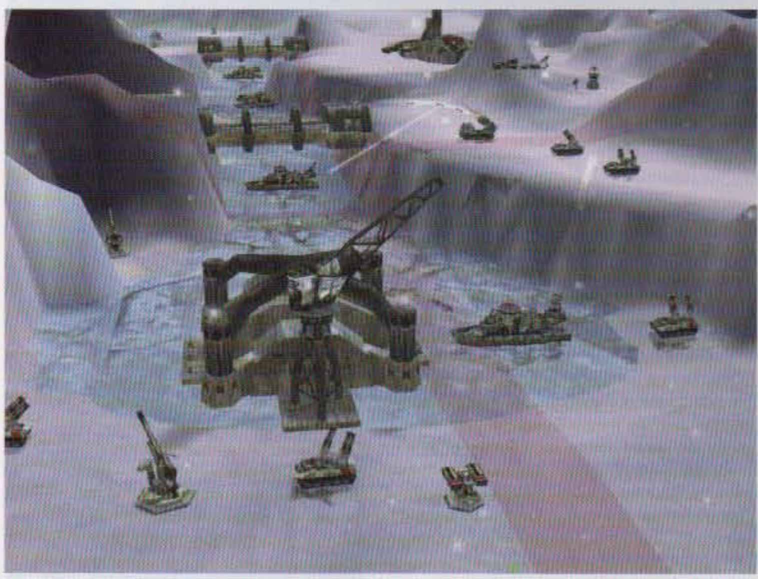
A little light relief

While they weren't exactly sidesplitting, the comic caricatures of the original *Z* added a pleasant chuckle to a genre that still isn't renowned for its comedic aspirations. Thankfully, this aspect has been maintained for the sequel, with the laissez-faire, gung-ho characteristics of clumsy robot warriors still in place. While cutscenes still don't provide any belly laughs, the sight of bored sentries entertaining themselves by butchering the local non-combatant fauna prove engagingly funny. However, it's a shame that this level of attention wasn't lavished on AI throughout the game.





Surprisingly for a game that owes such a debt to old-skool game dynamics, *Steel Soldiers* boasts a diverse selection of some of the most solidly realised 3D environments yet seen in an RTS



Despite enabling players to close and minimise menus and windows, the developer's attempt to build an interface that can keep up with the high pace of the game is, sadly, not entirely successful





When the original *Z* first appeared on shelves, no one knew that the rival *Command & Conquer* franchise was going to set the RTS agenda for nearly a decade. But with the vast majority of developers seeking only to emulate the pacing, structure, and objectives laid down by Westwood when it comes to producing yet another example of the genre, the arrival of *Steel Soldiers* comes as something of a welcome surprise. Like its predecessor, it imbues a prefabricated template with the rhythm and flow of an arcade or 16bit gameplay dynamic – fittingly for a game developed by the Bitmaps. Unlike its predecessor, which took so long to arrive that it looked dated next to *C&C*, it combines this with environments that, visually, are at the cutting edge.

Significantly, the impact of these 3D environments on the mechanics of play is well realised, thanks to a relatively innovative line-of-sight system that departs from the formula so beloved by much of the RTS pack. Despite the solidly realistic battlescapes, though, and their convincing effect on battle, their division into smaller, rationalised, resource-bearing territories gives *Steel Soldiers* a unique cadence. By shaping the course of conflict almost in the style of a boardgame by heightening the competition for resources, and by increasing the topographical reach of that competition, these territories lend a frantic pace to proceedings – a departure from the more traditional build-sortie-build tempo. And although the variety of units and mission objectives that categorise so many RTS outings are dutifully in place, this hi-octane uniqueness enables *Steel Soldiers* to stand out from the crowd.

Nevertheless, it is apparent that the developer has been hoisted by its own petard as the frenetic momentum and territorial scope of conflict demand an interface that is navigable at an appropriate speed. Despite laudable effort from the developer in the shape of menus and maps that can be moved and minimised, and a variety of ways to zoom in on a particular part of the battlescape, there are too many occasions which see the interface unable to keep up with the high speed of the game or undone by deficient AI.

So, it isn't clear whether *Steel Soldiers* will provide the next evolutionary trajectory of the RTS, but if nothing more it certainly provides an entertaining offshoot.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Red Faction

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Volition** Price: **£40** Release: **June 22**

While it is well supplied with firstperson shooters that boast a chiefly multiplayer appeal, PS2 still doesn't have a compelling oneplayer proposition. With its groundbreaking *Geo-Mod* engine, a comprehensive arsenal, and the ability to commandeer several vehicles, *Red Faction* promises much, but ultimately fails to deliver. Poor AI, mediocre level design, an underwhelming narrative, and the failure to fully exploit the engine's realtime deformation capability conspire to produce what can only be described as an average experience.

After witnessing several technical demos that highlighted the immense potential of *Geo-Mod* at preview stage, it comes as an immense disappointment to find that the developer has failed to capitalise. Instead of eliminating inconsistencies of logic, facilitating freeform level design, or offering new types of conundrum to spice up the 'find switch' paradigm, destructible scenery is merely tacked on during the first few levels of play.

Equally frustrating is the developer's failure to effectively utilise scripted events, cutscenes, or a dramatic narrative to build atmosphere. Scripted events seem unfinished, resulting in NPCs talking to thin air and behaving erratically. Cutscenes are uninspired, with one example ending with an ambush from enemy soldiers, which, more often than not, results in sudden death before the end of the sequence.

But there are signs of careless construction around technology throughout. Load screens occur far too frequently, last too long, and all too often are placed round the corner from an uneventful elevator journey, or in the middle of a countdown sequence, breaking up the pacing. Animation and textural diversity are average at best, and no thought has been given to using the distribution of weaponry to incentivise players or change the tempo of the game. The chief oversight, and most damaging, is that of AI. There is never a sense that opponents are anything more than automatons blessed with superhuman reactions and vision to compensate for a stultifying lack of initiative.

Which isn't to say that *Red Faction* is without its saving graces. The large selection of land, air and underwater vehicles add some welcome variation, and the *Geo-Mod* engine is better utilised in multiplayer mode, but it looks like PS2 owners will have to wait for that compelling oneplayer FPS.

Edge rating: Five out of ten





There are few cerebral challenges to be found in *Red Faction*. The almost compulsory stealth sections (above), though not particularly well realised, do require some thought, but the game's only puzzle arrives right at the end















Patching things up

Although designed for a console, the PS2 version of *Red Faction* seems to have more in common with PC shooters than its console brethren. The most obvious difference, though, is the availability of patches on the PC. It's debatable whether minor tweaks to the likes of AI would be capable of vastly improving the title, but there were several bugs and glitches in **Edge**'s copy that might reasonably be eliminated by a patch. Coupled with a PC-style save function, offering no autosave, the possibility of encountering the PS2's own 'blue screen of death' after significant play is not a welcome one.

Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX

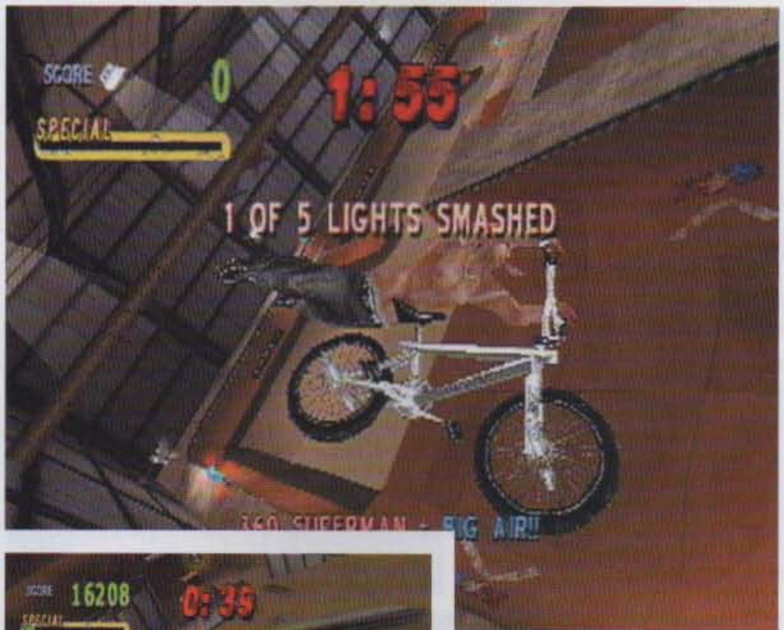
Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Runecraft** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**







Like Tony Hawk's videos, you receive mag covers for completing challenges (high/pro score, hidden cover, T-R-I-C-K, and specific, such as hit all of the level's satellite dishes)





If you build it...

Virtually identical to *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*'s version, *Hoffman*'s BMX park editor enables some reasonably complex contraptions to be digitally created with remarkable ease. The equipment selection is comprehensive, and to help you on your way five pre-made examples come as part of the package. Interestingly, your creations can often look more graphically stable than the main game's (admittedly larger) versions. Nevertheless, it's always a welcome feature.



Things do look angular (particularly when put against *THPS2*), and there's plenty of polygonal break up to spoil the illusion. Occasionally you can also ride through the scenery, which clearly hampers action

Forming part of Activision's recently established extreme sports label, O_2, *Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX* starts off as roughly as Acclaim's Z-Axis-developed *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX*. Eventually, like the latter, proceedings feel substantially better, and then begins an interesting game of comparison between the two.

In reality, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* is a lot closer to *Hoffman* than its BMX counterpart – hardly surprising given that Neversoft lent its engine to the Runecraft chaps – but as skateboarding and BMXing are two distinct disciplines, it makes sense to concentrate on *Hoffman*'s nearest genuine competitor.

First, the formalities: *Hoffman* offers eight pro riders and levels to *Mirra*'s ten and 12, respectively. *Hoffman* has a park editor, *Mirra* hasn't. *Hoffman* is visually superior, with somewhat stabler environments, has better attention to detail (riders display individuality when performing same tricks), feels faster and slightly smoother in play, offers selectable bike parts, and boasts an arguably superior soundtrack. *Mirra* grinds back into contention with substantially more challenges per round (*Hoffman* only has five), larger levels, better collision detection, finer bail animation, a massive trick list, and a superior, more comprehensive, twoplayer section. Acclaim's game is also more player friendly in structure terms and offers greater replayability in the form of nine records to beat per level.

Once you get on track, the differences keep bunny hopping their way into play. While *Hoffman* displays none of the mid-trick lag that *Mirra* often suffers from, its riders do occasionally seem sluggish in getting their feet back on the pedals, forcing you to acquire unnecessarily high air to land elementary moves. Better bikes help, of course, but with these things can occasionally look too frenetic, destroying the otherwise realistic feel of the action. Transitions are also harder to pull, and the game punishes you more severely when it's time for the wheels to come back on the ground (although you can also argue that *Mirra* is overly forgiving in this area).

So, the first 32bit BMX battle ends in something of stalemate. Which of the two you pick is down to personal preference – *Hoffman* offers more realism, whereas *Mirra* delivers a marginally better, if arcadey, experience. Both entertain in differing fashions. Then again, you could always wait for the next-gen versions.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

I-War 2: Edge Of Chaos

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Infogrames** Developer: **Particle Systems** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**

S*pace Invaders* begat *Elite*, *Elite* begat *Wing Commander*, and *Wing Commander*'s legacy is one of overblown space opera. That's the path, but the history's more complicated, since somewhere in the futuristic lineage of space combat it looks like there's a split. On one side of the family are the purebred fighting juggernauts of *Freespace*, and on the other are the storyline epics like *X: Beyond The Frontier*. This being binary genetics, there's actually not much difference between the sides. You're still firing lasers in a vacuum; you're still avoiding implosion. It's all about presentation, and fans of the original *I-War* will be pleased to note that that's exactly where the sequel excels.

That's not to say the game's lacking substance, either. Three acts, each split into a dozen titled mission-based chapters, form the bulk of the game's typically PC-sized experience. Before that comes the prologue, recounting your experiences as a space-tripping 15-year-old. This serves as a training mission and throws you into brutal searing laser combat almost immediately. Combat is fast, but cautious, and X-wing head-on tacticians won't find much luck here, especially within what initially appears to be a very unforgiving dynamic.

Push past the unexpected difficulty, though, and it transpires that *I-War*'s real hope is to please everyone. The piracy, trading, and non-linear exploration will excite the true believers who spend their lives waiting for Braben. The tasks, varied but familiar enough to cause déjà vu in all but the most inexperienced space gamers, will entertain those wanting another *Wing Commander*. The imagery is spectacular; the plot solid and coherent; the game dynamic stuck in the mid-'90s, unyielding and enjoyable. This is gaming safety.

But it doesn't really matter. *I-War 2* isn't progress, and **Edge** strongly suspects that progress isn't what fans of this subgenre are seeking. They want what they've always wanted: more airport trash aesthetic sci-fi that places them in the cockpit, adrenaline carefully paced with measured plot twists. They'll get it with *I-War 2: Edge Of Chaos*, but – especially in view of all the titles that have preceded Particle Systems' introspective effort – perhaps they ought to be asking for a little more. They may one day get it.

Edge rating: Six out of ten







I-War 2's galactic map is the best portrayal of space since *Frontier*, and much less confusing than Braben's effort. Crossing huge distances is made easy by the targeting system and autopilot







Particle Systems' vision of space combat draws from TV sci-fi, and the laser duelling will please Trekkers and fans of 'Babylon 5' alike. A range of views are available, including cockpit and external cameras

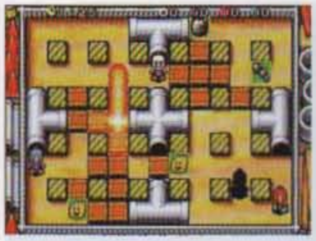


Mawkish mood setting

I-War 2's story deals with your father's debt-induced suicide, and your quest for revenge. It's a dark (albeit oft-trod) direction, so it's curious that Particle Systems has chosen to treat it with a cartoon gloss that dissipates the tension; it's hard to feel sorry for your newly orphaned self when you have all the gravitas of a Macaulay Culkin film. For those unmoved by the rendered sci-fi soap opera, there's also a quickstart option which enables the player to jump straight into an increasingly difficult infinite dogfight, and the now-obligatory wealth of multiplayer options.

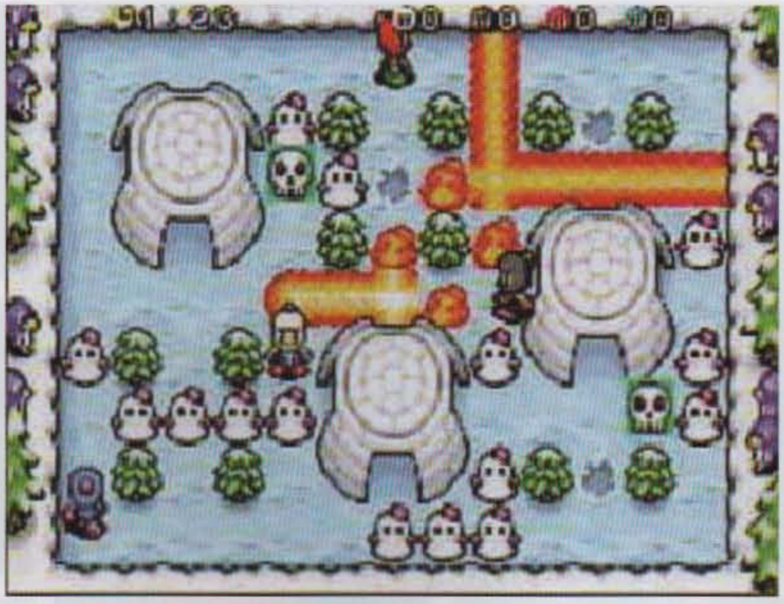
Bomberman Story

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Hudson** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**





The RPG mode offers power-ups, enemies, minibosses, and a simple quest structure. It's an interesting diversion, but it pales next to the multiplayer experience



Igloos offer stealth, but not protection. Most of the additions to the standard *Bomberman* dynamic will be familiar to dedicated bombers, but that doesn't stop the fourplayer mode from being spectacular fun

The review of excellent Super Famicom titles now reaches Hudson's *Bomberman*, but something's changed. Rather than the linear level structure that ran through the previous titles, *Bomberman Story* applies the chain-reaction dynamic to a top-down adventure.

In essence it's a competent copy of *A Link To The Past*, with the protagonist's sword replaced with bombs. The stress has to be on copy, though; the imagery here is startlingly similar to Zelda's Super Famicom adventure, right down to cartoon foliage and the cracks in rock walls. But while there's the same balance of puzzles, action, and questing that make up Hyrule's brightly textured plains, there's none of the spark, which is why the return of the cramped single-screen structure is welcome in the multiplayer.

Bomberman's appeal has always been in local competition, and there's no change for the 32bit pocket version. The Japanese text will render the storymode incomprehensible to most Westerners, but for those buying the game for the right reasons – a desire for fast-paced explosive rivalry – it shouldn't matter. Those with handheld versions already may wish to wait for something more surprising.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Rayman Advance

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **UbiSoft** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£30** Release: **June 22**

Look at the top 40 all-formats chart and you'll notice that the original *Rayman* – released in 1995 – is still there. Depressingly, the new *Rayman* for Game Boy Advance may sport four layers of parallax scrolling and beautifully rendered cartoon sprites, but the platforming action remains as tired as ever. Jump, climb, collect tokens, and then free a race of peoples ensnared by an evil despot. The backdrop could be exchanged with any game in the same genre.

Asking for massive gameplay innovations on a system in its infancy is perhaps unfair, but UbiSoft's decision to stick to a traditional jump/climb mechanic soon has the eyelids drooping. The size of the sprites also asks the player to make too many frustrating leaps of faith. There is the occasional boost to an ability – a punch, say, or the opportunity to grow seeds into a higher platform – but it is the ease at which the game can be mastered which really disheartens.

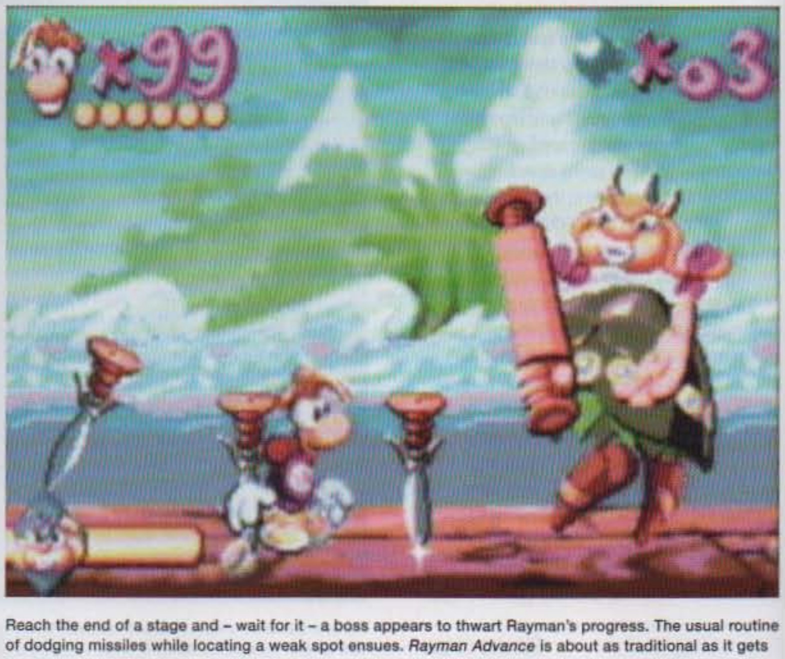
In its favour the game boasts six worlds and is large enough to keep the less dextrous happy for several days. While *Rayman Advance* isn't hugely flawed, the humdrum formula will be entertaining only to those with a vapid imagination.

Edge rating: Four out of ten





At key stages Rayman can take to the skies on a surreal purple wasp. Unfortunately, the speed of oncoming enemies turns this into a memory test



Reach the end of a stage and – wait for it – a boss appears to thwart Rayman's progress. The usual routine of dodging missiles while locating a weak spot ensues. *Rayman Advance* is about as traditional as it gets

Going for gold

Intrinsic Graphics redefines multiplatform development through *Alchemy*



Rémi Arnaud, director of technology, Intrinsic Graphics

INTRINSIC ALCHEMY



Alchemy's extendable object model ensures that game code takes advantage of specific hardware features and is also portable

URL
www.intrinsic.com

The outbreak of middleware engines has now reached epidemic proportions. But the situation doesn't concern **Rémi Arnaud**, director of technology for the newest contender, Intrinsic Graphics' *Alchemy* platform.

"The timing is perfect," he says. "The technology to build something like *Alchemy* became available only recently. Not long ago C++ compilers were not good enough, and the console hardware did not have the level of complexity that *Alchemy* has been designed to handle. It gives us almost an unfair advantage compared to products that were designed several years ago."

Competitors such as Criterion or NDL will disagree, but Intrinsic is aggressively pushing its perceived technical superiority, even to the extent of attempting to redefine the semantics of middleware. Previously, the terms 'crossplatform' and 'multiplatform' have been broadly regarded as interchangeable, but for Intrinsic the difference is vital. 'Multiplatform' means that the developer has to do a specific compile for each platform targeted, meaning the engine will take advance of hardware-specific features but at the cost of portability. 'Crossplatform' technology is highly portable, but doesn't allow programmers low-level access to hardware.



Intrinsic Graphics believes *Alchemy* is technologically superior to its middleware opposition

"*Alchemy* is crossplatform as it provides an API and a file format that works on every platform, and it is multiplatform as it provides the best possible implementation of that API on the different platforms," explains Arnaud. "To give an example, we provide crossplatform shaders that are available directly to the artist within their favourite modeller. What the artist does not see is that we provide a totally different implementation of the shader using the best possible algorithm on each platform, depending of the availability of hardware features."

The key to *Alchemy*'s performance is that while it has a thin abstraction software layer that sits on top of the target hardware, it relies on an extendable object model – what Intrinsic refers to as its 'patented Object Description Language'. This means programmers can replace any part, adding custom features.

"We provide a Visual Context class that is the crossplatform graphics API," Arnaud says. "It is actually a pure virtual class. It is implemented, at linking time, with the hardware-specific class, therefore adding no intermediate layer. If one wants to directly access to the underlying hardware, one just has to include the hardware specific class instead of the generic class and immediately get access to additional, but not portable, features," he says.

Yet, clever as *Alchemy* is, success for Intrinsic will only come as it signs up developers. So far the only announced customer is Yeti Interactive, a start-up out of Ubi Soft's *Rayman*-centric Montpellier studio which is working on an XBox platformer. "We are working with several studios but we don't have any shipping titles yet," explains Arnaud. "This is going to change later this year, but I cannot talk about any deals until my company makes an official announcement."



Alchemy is being promoted as a both a cross- and multiplatform solution for developers

Money behind the brains

Much has been made of the fact that alongside the venture capitalists who have invested in Intrinsic is one Sony. So does this mean Intrinsic is inherently more focused on PlayStation2? Not according to Arnaud: "Sony Computer Entertainment and Sony Corporation made investments in Intrinsic Graphics, and the interesting part is that they were concerned about the same thing. They were afraid that we I would be perceived as skewed toward PlayStation2, and they did not want that to happen." Instead he sees the companies' involvement as a strong vote of confidence: "The fact that we are the only middleware provider who has an investment from a console platform provider such as Sony tells you a great deal about what they think of our technology and our team."

All tooled up

Virtools' content creation is lowering the barriers for on and offline game development

Nicolas Galinotti, lead developer, Virtools

Virtools







One online 3D game via *Virtools* is *Wipeout* clone *Volcano Racer*. It weighs in as a 500Kb download

The convergence between off and online 3D games is creating one of the most dynamic technological battlegrounds in the industry. In the online arena, giants such as Macromedia are squaring up to WildTangent and Groove 3D, with size of downloads and quality of streaming the all-important attributes. Combine this with the traditional competition over 3D engines, and key design issues become how to balance the grunt of high-end performance with the efficiency of the network.

French company Virtools is one of the few to straddle both camps with its 3D engine being used for traditional CD products as well as over the Internet, thanks to its Virtools Web player. Problems over its name have limited its public visibility of the past 12 months, however; it changed name from Virtools to NeMo in 2000, only to lose a court case against a similarly named company, which forced a reversion to its original title. But with that episode out of the way, the company is looking forward to the release of *Virtools 2.0* to get its name back in the headlines.

While most 3D engines rely on programmer skill, *Virtools* takes a completely different approach. "Bertrand Duplat, the chairman and founder of the company, wanted to make the most complex functions accessible to non-programmers using an advanced graphic interface," explains lead developer **Nicolas Galinotti**. "Other game engines are mostly script or code-based, whereas *Virtools* can rely totally on our revolutionary building blocks, called behaviours, although we still







we offer the possibility for programmers to develop and design their own building blocks in C++."

These behaviours can be attached to a game entity to define the interaction between the entity and its environment within *Virtools*' graphical interface. Complex behaviours can be created by combining different behaviours together and in this way users can build up their own custom behaviours for all game objects. It is this approach when combined with Virtools' engine's off and online characteristics that make it such an interesting proposition. Galinotti reckons the split between the two markets is 60:40 in favour of offline at present, but this seems likely to change as the Web gears up to 3D. Virtools' modular engine runs on three different APIs – DirectX 5.0, 7.0 and an OpenGL software renderer – although 3D hardware is recommended. The Virtools Web Player is also required – a 750Kb download, of which the around 400Kb is required for the first level of game, with the remainder streamed on a per-level basis.

But as Galinotti points out, Virtools is keen to migrate on to consoles too: "Our current focus is on XBox, which for many reasons is a natural platform for Virtools. We have some customers working with an advance version of *2.0* [to be shipped in June] to design XBox titles, and the game *Core* by Zoink Entertainment is a good example. We are studying the possibilities which would give us access to all possible platforms."

Pricing for *Virtools 2.0* reflects this willingness, with the full source code for the engine available at £37,500 and a single-user package costing a mere £3,100. Previous clients have included the likes of Havas, Hypnotix, and Microids, and – as Virtools is quick to point out – their projects were all profitable.

URL
www.virtools.com

Web competition

"*WildTangent* and *Director 8.5* are excellent competitors to position our technology against," says Galinotti of two of Virtools' Web engine rivals. "*WildTangent* is a pure SDK 100 per cent Web oriented, where *Virtools* has a user interface enabling non-programmers to develop games and is well suited for off line and online development. *Shockwave 3D* has a weaker rendering engine, although it does work on Macs. Also the development of interactivity for *Shockwave 3D* is complex as it uses Lingo scripts, and the plug-in of *Shockwave* is a huge download where our player is only 750Kb. The Mac player is our next priority for the Web."

Out of this world management

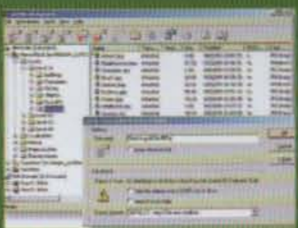
NxN's *alienbrain* doesn't only make development more efficient, it allows it to be geographic distributive



Gregor vom Scheidt, CEO, NxN Software







Alienbrain has four different interfaces depending on the user: shown here are the programmer and the project administrator set-ups

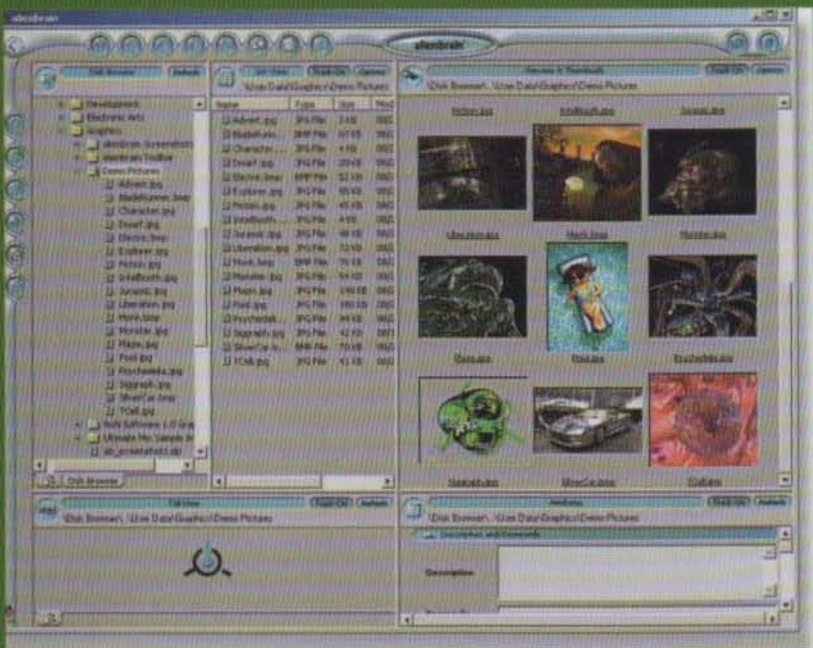
Digital production management solutions such as NxN Software's *alienbrain* hardly count as a new concept in game development – NxN was formed in 1997 and *alienbrain* is on the brink of its fifth major iteration. What is new, however, is the working environments such client/server file management systems are now supporting.

This was recently highlighted by the adoption of *alienbrain* by Sony Online. It has three main studio locations ranging from its San Diego headquarters to facilities in Austin and St Louis. Significantly, the first title to use *alienbrain* is *Star Wars Galaxies*. "The Sony deal stands as a testament to the confidence large game developers have in *alienbrain*, and to the understanding that a comprehensive solution is needed to support development team members and manage today's complex production processes," explains **Gregor vom Scheidt**, CEO of NxN.

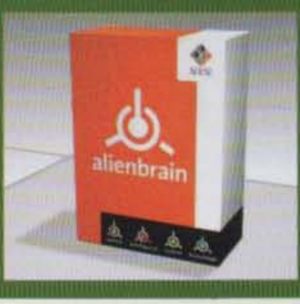
This distributive approach to game development has also been taken up by Infogrames, which is in the progress of converting its studios over to *alienbrain*. In time, this means that Infogrames' studios will be able to share art assets, which has the potential to create huge time savings considering the company's longterm commitment to Warner's Looney Tunes characters. With *alienbrain*, a model created in Australia for an XBox game could be utilised for a PlayStation game being developed in Sheffield.

Key to this is *alienbrain*'s ability to track the status of all game assets in the production cycle. As **Stephen Peacock**, NxN's account manager for the UK, explains: "Most asset management systems start when the asset is finished; we start when the asset is being planned. *Alienbrain* tracks versions of the file as it evolves throughout the production process. Our tools are designed to help the development of the asset as opposed to the archiving of the asset once it's been done. In the games industry this is much more relevant because it's rare you can reuse an asset directly without tweaking it as the next time you make a game, your engine's better and you can have more polys."

The other main push for *alienbrain* is ensuring its integration with art packages like *3DS Max* and *Maya* and development tools such as *CodeWarrior*. In particular, the recently released alienbrain plug-in for *CodeWarrior* links into improved search engine and import/export options. "*CodeWarrior* is one of the most versatile development solutions for game programmers," maintains vom Scheidt. "In order to offer our customers a total digital production management solution, it is absolutely necessary for *alienbrain* to provide easy access to the high-end programming solutions development teams need."



URL
www.nxn-software.com



Allbrain: four different flavours

One of the key attributes of *alienbrain* is its layered approach, which sees four distinct versions for specific users. The two most obvious are 'genius' and 'intelligence' for artists and programmers respectively. These integrate into external tools via plug-ins and *alienbrain*'s scripting language. *Alienbrain* control is designed for project administrators. It allows them to define user access and modification rights. The final version, 'knowledge', offers project managers high-level access and allows the export of statistics via *Excel*.

AI together now

Emergent character AI is the goal for the *Autonomy Character Engine*

Dr Paul Kruszewski, president and CTO, Biographic Technologies



Bio|Graphic



A hungry shark and two schools of fish give an example of emergent AI behaviour using Biographic's *ACE*

URL
www.biographictech.com

CPU load and the drive towards photorealistic graphics have been the two major bottlenecks to restrict the growth of AI in games, according to Biographic Technologies' president and CTO **Paul Kruszewski**. But with significant movement on both fronts, he predicts strong improvements.

"The next thing is to improve interactivity, in particular with autonomous characters," says Kruszewski. "AI-heavy games like *The Sims* and *Black & White* are just the tip of the iceberg. This decade of game development belongs to AI." And, with the release of version 1.0 of BioGraphic's *Autonomy Character Engine (ACE)*, Kruszewski is putting his money where his mouth is.

A middleware AI engine, *ACE* is designed to allow easy access to both artists or programmers so AI can be added into a game using plug-ins for modelling tools such as *Maya* or via a programmer's SDK. "*ACE* has two key characteristics: realtime performance and programmable SDK," Kruszewski explains. "Since *ACE* is a realtime engine, artists have a great deal of interactivity. Through MEL scripts and key frames a technical artist has almost as much control over *ACE* as a programmer. As *ACE* also comes with an SDK, it can be linked not only into the art package, but the level editor and ultimately into the engine."

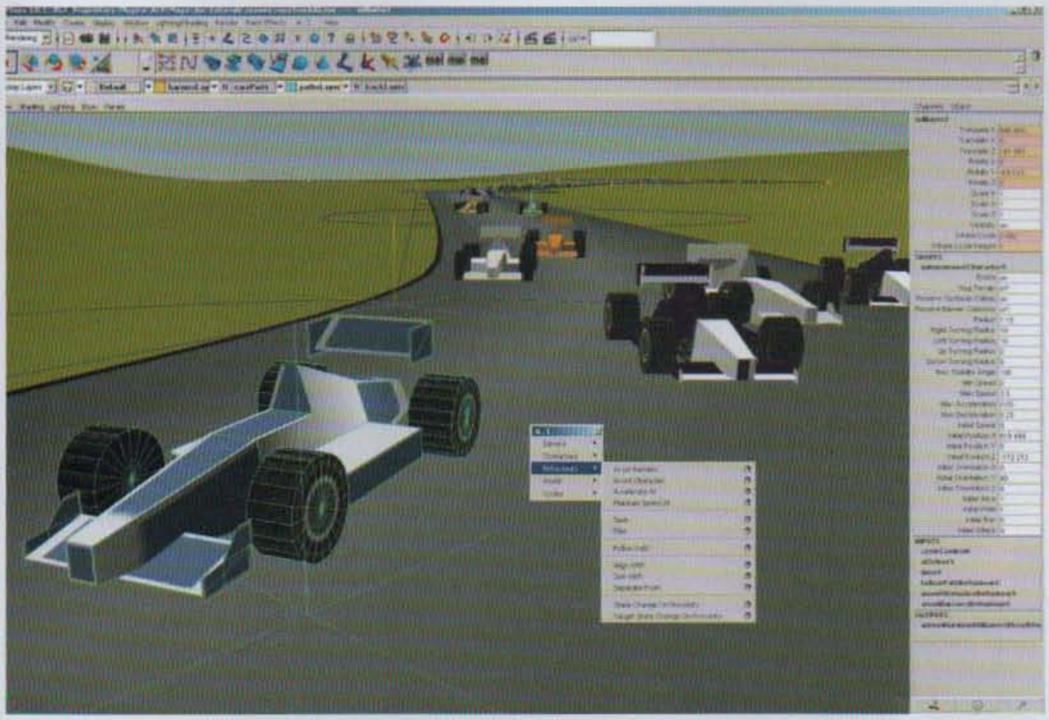
As the CPU performs AI calculations, multiplatform compatibility is not an issue, but integrating into game engines certainly is. The behaviour of an AI character is obviously dependent on such variables as geometry and collision detection.

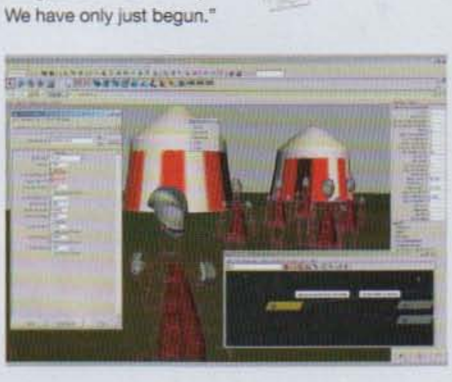
"From a programming perspective, we view a game engine as a main loop that contains successive calls to the various layers of the world: the geometric layer; the AI layer; the physics layer; and the rendering layer," says Kruszewski. "The geometric layer tells the AI layer the state of the characters' world. The AI layer then decides how the characters react to their world. The physics layer then enforces physical reality on the characters. The only hooks needed are to create the brains of the characters, update them on the state of their world, and respond to their desires for motion."

Despite *ACE v1.0*'s imminent release, Kruszewski is keen to discuss *v2.0*. "*V1.0* is a reactive system with no real knowledge-acquisition mechanisms. In *v2.0*, not only will characters be able to learn and remember, but they will be able to use this to plan. For example, with *v1.0*, we are able to create a simple Capture The Flag game in *Maya* and export into an engine based on Criterion's *RenderWare*. Some characters can charge at the flag and fight, while others can hold defensive positions. They can't make complex decisions such as retreating, nor can they take advantage of terrain. Using *v2.0*, our CTF demo will get a lot more deadly. We have only just begun."

Look! No scripts

While most game AI is currently based on hard-coded scripts, BioGraphic relies on the emergent A-life steering behaviour pioneered by the father of flocking, Craig Reynolds. "We strongly feel that emergent behaviours are the future of AI since finite state machines quickly suffer from combinatorial explosion of states and scripting is both time consuming to create and its results become predictable the longer the player plays," says Kruszewski. "Whereas, with emergent behaviours, the game designer's work is in describing the character's personality and how the character responds under different environmental stimuli." An example is *ACE*'s fishtank demonstration. With no scripting and only one keyframe, it models a shark attacking schools of fish.





One demo involves Roman soldiers who have to react to an ambush, as well as traverse mountains and dodge boulders

Diary of a videogame

Busy, exciting, and stimulating times at Brain In A Jar

Brain In A Jar diary, part six
by managing director Matthew Gabriel



Just returned from E3, and what a show it was – although for some reason it seemed much more relaxed this year. I think we organised our meetings better than last year, leaving more time to get from meeting to meeting. What did you all think of the show? Did Nintendo steal the day for you as well?

MCV reckons it is 'Advantage Nintendo', and I would have to agree. Considering the lack of hype from Nintendo they not only stole the show, but they did it in style. Sony looked like they knew exactly what they were doing with some good titles coming soon, but it seems the disappointment was XBox. Most people I spoke to were not impressed. There were some interesting titles around, but as usual I didn't get much time to wander the showfloor. I tried to do the rounds on the driving games, obviously taking a good look at *Gran Turismo 3*. It has improved a lot since I last saw it, and now looks very good, but the handling seems like it is pretty much the same as previous versions, which, admittedly, isn't necessarily a bad thing.

"Nintendo not only stole the show, but they did it in style. Sony looked like they knew exactly what they were doing... the disappointment was XBox"





Stuntman (above) impressed the Brain In A Jar MD, but he found *Gran Turismo 3*'s handling largely unchanged

Another game that looked really good was *Stuntman*, displaying what looked like an impressive car model and physics engine. I will be looking forward to that game not only to play, but also to compare to our physics and car model.

We had some great meetings, pitching our new concept. The idea seemed to go down very well, with all the publishers we saw wanting more. After the chaos of getting everything ready for E3 – for which I'd like to thank the team (they worked through the night) – we are now busy preparing more materials to send on to the publishers we met. The other interesting thing was the number of publishers with green-lit concepts who were looking for developers to develop them. We are in the running for four of these, which has got to be good news.



The Game Developers Conference proved some inspiration for BIJ designer Pig

The other strange thing that happened was a real bonus for us. Sky TV are making a six-part documentary on the game industry to be shown on the .tv channel towards the end of June. They contacted us through our agent Mark Cochrane to feature in one of the six parts. So, having met them in London before E3 to discuss the programme, they came out to the show with us. The idea is to follow a development team attempting to get a deal, which involved them filming us before, during, and after meetings. Most of the publishers weren't up for being filmed, so unfortunately there is very little footage of actual meetings.

They also followed me round the show looking at games, and attempting to get a Sony party ticket. So, if any of you saw me wandering around E3 being followed by a camera, I apologise for looking a complete twat. It was actually good fun, though, and once we'd done the first meeting with Dolby the 'there's a camera in my face, I'm going to freeze' effect disappeared. They are coming up in about a week to film us in the office working on post-E3 materials, so if you want a laugh tune in to Sky Digital to watch some silly Americans shout: "Is he famous?"

We have now moved into the new offices. The team moved in while I was at E3, which means I've avoided dismantling and rebuilding the desks twice now. It's so much nicer to be in comfortable surroundings, and it's a more suitable place to bring publishers to. I didn't realise how much testing they do at the Oulton Park Circuit; it seems to be every day so far, but I have been told that we are now entitled to free tickets to all events held at the track.

In my last diary I said I would let you know my thoughts on the Game Developers Conference, and it was well worth it. Both Chris and Pig came back buzzing with ideas and immediately called a meeting to discuss the direction we were taking with our concepts. This has spilled over to the rest of the team and lifted us all. Pig has come up with two new concepts since returning, and one of these is what we pitched with some success at E3. Chris came back with two new books covering programming subjects that had caught his interest at GDC.

From the mighty pen of our designer Pig, his comments: 'It was my first trip to GDC, and I found it infinitely more useful than any of the numerous trade events I've attended over the years. It was quite a revelation going to a show where you actually pick up something useful besides the usual piles of trashy freebies and pamphlets you never look at again. The standard of the lectures was variable, but that's only to be expected with the number of speakers there, and when they were good they were blinding – Will Wright's discourse was particularly special, and Merv Minsky was excellent in a mad professor kind of way. For an impoverished company it's quite a big slice of cash to cough up to send two people to the GDC, but it was worth every penny, and I recommend that everyone should badger their bosses to go. Even if you don't learn much (which we did), it will certainly reinstall your faith in the industry and prove that events can be much more than extravagant piss-ups and booth babes'.

Until next time...



Format: **Amstrad CPC/Various**
Publisher: **Ocean**
Developer: **Jon Ritman/Bernie Drummond**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1987**





The making of…

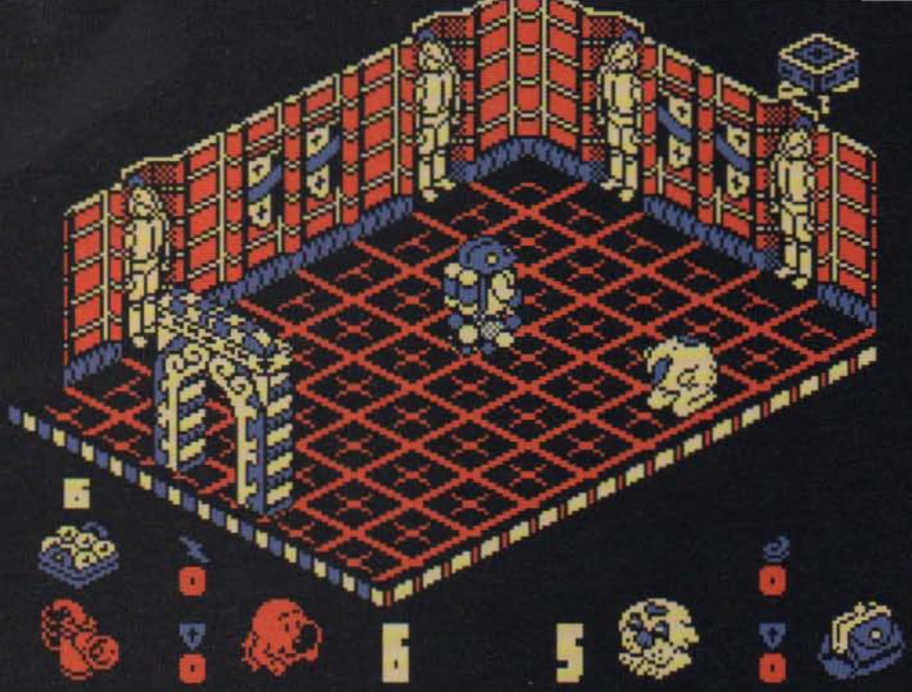
Head Over Heels

It was based on old code, inspired by an earlier title, and had its plot lashed together in a matter of minutes, but Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond's opus ended up a masterpiece. Edge finds out how

Head Over Heels was blatantly modelled on *Knight Lore* and borrowed 80 per cent of its code from another title. Hardly credentials to assure the isometric puzzle game a place in the annals of videogame history. But that last 20 per cent of code, brilliantly conceived and honed to perfection, explored new territory in terms of character co-operation and level design. Indeed, the symbiotic partnership at the heart of the game demonstrated an audacious level of sophistication.

Fittingly, Head and Heels were born out of an alliance between artist **Bernie Drummond** and coder **Jon Ritman**. "Jon had this idea of symbiosis after watching a programme about animals which could combine together in nature," explains Drummond. "It was his idea, but I vaguely remember this Marvel Comic version of 'Planet Of The Apes' back in the '70s. There was a story in which a gorilla and a human teamed up. The gorilla's arms were broken and the humans legs were broken, so the gorilla gave the human a sort of piggy back. When Jon suggested the idea, I took it in that direction."

While Drummond imbued the game with its distinctive surreal quality, Ritman concentrated all his efforts on game design. "I worked on all the Z80 versions," he recalls. "The Amstrad CPC, the Amstrad PCW, and the Spectrum. But at the time I never thought of *Head Over*



Heels as groundbreaking. *Batman* came first, and *Head Over Heels* was virtually the same code. I can clearly remember thinking that this new game was just a way that allowed me to get more variables into the amount of puzzles."

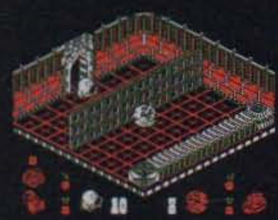
Ritman's masterstroke was to take the existing isometric puzzle game formula – famously pioneered by Ultimate's *Knight Lore* – and add a staggering level of intricacy by creating two characters which could join and separate at the whim of the player. Head was granted the power to jump to high places, while Heels – a dog-like character – could move fast over flat surfaces. Further puzzle combinations were provided by the tools Head and Heels could discover during the game. Separately, the duo could only operate to a limited degree, but together they shared their skills and could overcome vastly more demanding puzzles.

"I was frequently coming up with quite complex problems which would include a mental element plus a physical element," reveals Ritman. "There's a room near the beginning





Head and Heels began their quest in the same location but could not join forces due to the barrier which divided the room. Once together, their combined skills allowed them to overcome increasingly complicated puzzles





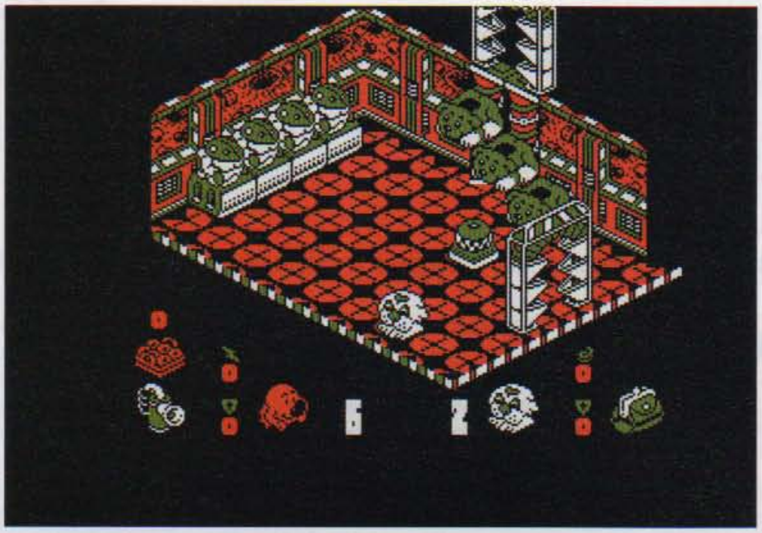


of the game which has a Dalek with a Prince Charles head on the top. That's where you get the bag for Heels. Initially, that was far more complex and had a lot of mental stuff in it. But when I watched a friend play it I realised that there was a problem. If someone thought they solved a mental element and then failed the physical test because they didn't make a jump, they would then assume they hadn't solved the mental puzzle even though they had. They would start trying other stuff. I realised I had to separate the two. So, I would put a mental puzzle with minimum physical problem in one room, and then a physical problem with minimum mental problem in the next room. It was the only way that made it work."

Though Ritman created and implemented all the puzzles in the game, Drummond's artwork provided much of the inspiration. With a simple draw program – and little computer experience – the 19-year-old artist began experimenting

by moving pixels around the screen until images began to form. "I did have a surprisingly large input considering I was new and didn't program," recalls Drummond. "At first I didn't really know what I was doing and I was turning pixels on and off in this little box. If you looked over my shoulder after 20 minutes it would look like a Rorschach test. If you looked half-an-hour later you would just go, 'Fuck, that's Ernest Borgnine – how did you do that?'"

Drummond's improvised approach to graphic generation alongside his surreal style inspired many of Ritman's design decisions. "My look was a cross between Dali and Disney," he adds. "Jon never rejected anything. I used to give him 12 pictures, and there would be a Welsh dresser, a suitcase, or a stack of bricks on a hod. Jon would go, 'What is that? It's gorgeous'. He would utilise them slightly better than I'd imagined. I saw them as pretty pictures, whereas Jon would go, 'Four dogs as a staircase? We'll make it so Head can't use them because dogs don't walk on dogs.'"



Each character had a item to help them on their mission. Heels could collect objects in his handbag while Head had a hooter to shoot doughnuts. Finding these tools formed the first goal in the game

"Immediately after seeing *Knight Lore* I just wanted to do that. It was the best thing I'd ever seen. It's like where you were when Kennedy died"







The design of *Head Over Heels* was a glorious example of instinct over method. Ritman didn't plan a thing. He added rooms one by one and left the code which joined his characters until the very end. The approach belied a game which exuded an air of delicacy and sophisticated structure – qualities which only crystallised towards the very end of development. Spanning five planets and a moon surface, the game contained a massive 301 rooms. With such an eclectic array of graphics at his disposal, Ritman had little option but to build a bizarre story around the two central characters. As two spies from the planet Freedom, read the blurb on the game cover, Head and Heels are sent to liberate the Blacktooth Empire. "I made the whole game up and then added the bullshit in the last ten minutes," admits the coder.

But for all its Dali-inspired imagery, *Head Over Heels* demonstrated a reliable internal consistency. Heel's hooter would fire doughnuts to paralyse enemies – a result of the creature eating the food. Stairways made of sausage dogs would disappear whenever Head appeared in the room – they were scared of their canine rival, ran the logic. Players could constantly alternate between the two characters, thus avoiding the frustration of encountering a single puzzle which could not be cracked. Although Head and Heels began life apart, one of the game's main goals was to bring them together. Teasingly, Ritman placed a room close to the start in which both characters could see each other but not actually meet. It was a inspired touch which typified the game's charming design.

Ritman developed *Head Over Heels* simultaneously for all the Z80 machines. He was strict with his coding, ensuring that only three routines needed to be altered to port it over to any of the formats. But it was Ultimate's seminal *Knight Lore* which spurred Ritman on towards producing elegantly designed and coded game experiences. "Immediately after seeing *Knight Lore* I just wanted to do that. It was the best thing I'd ever seen. It's like where you were when Kennedy died. I've talked to Chris Stamper since then about *Knight Lore*, and I know that the efficiency of *Batman* and *Head Over Heels* was so far beyond *Knight Lore*, particularly in the way the graphics were generated. He used a 6K buffer – 6K out of 48K is quite a serious hit. I used a 256-byte buffer – a huge difference, which gave me enough room for the whole map."

The only way Ritman could cram all the data into the buffer was to use a grouping routine. "The whole map was contained in 5K. It was a bit-streamed map format with lots of optimisation. I put individual bricks down and then, for instance, grouped together a row of eight bricks. In memory terms, I could then put down that whole row as if it were a single brick. It might only take a byte to put that down, so a byte of memory and you have a row of bricks."

The game took nine months to complete, and once finished only the small matter of the game's name required tweaking. "The working title was very appropriate nowadays," laughs Ritman. "From the very beginning we called it *Foot And Mouth*. It started off as a joke, but by the end of nine months we were getting attached to it. I took it to Ocean, but they just said, 'You've got to be joking'."

Some games shake the gaming firmament with an original concept, others startle with groundbreaking visuals. While *Head Over Heels* did neither of these things, its purity of level design, imaginative puzzles, and character mechanics placed it a world apart from its closest rivals. "But its greatest achievement is that it is still valid as a game," concludes Ritman. "When I look back at *Head Over Heels*, particularly on the Amstrad where it was very colourful, I just think it still plays incredibly well. It was special."

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 36, September 1996

Choosing a lead feature isn't easy when your magazine lies at the **Edge** of interactive entertainment. The retina-scarring cover art of issue 36 may have implied something technologically mindblowing; history doesn't record how delighted readers were to consume an eight-page feature on data storage, including thoughts on transistor density and bits per square inch.

'Europe unlikely to figure in N64 strategy' mumbled the news section, a cautious soundbite which would prove all too accurate. Testscreen led with a look at *Z*, surprising those who'd hoped Sonic Team's *NiGHTS Into Dreams* might receive the same attention as the previous issue's *Mario 64*. **Edge**'s damning review of the Saturn's great white hope scored it at 8/10 ('Not quite enough to be an all-time classic'), stoking the ire of anti-**Edge** Sega zealots nationwide.

Blade, slated for an Autumn '96 release but eventually morphing into *Severance*, made its debut Prescreen appearance: '*Blade*'s realtime light sourcing and shadows are just two areas where it excels', gushed **Edge**. 'Rebel[act]'s effort is set to raise the stakes in a stroke'. If only they'd known.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"We're trying to set up [Segasoft] as an independent software software publisher. It really should be publishing on any platform." Sega's former US president, **Tom Kalinske**, has a bright idea

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

'*Die Hard 3* could not be described as derivative, combining elements of *Destruction Derby* and *Ridge Racer*'. derivative n. 1. – something derived from another source

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

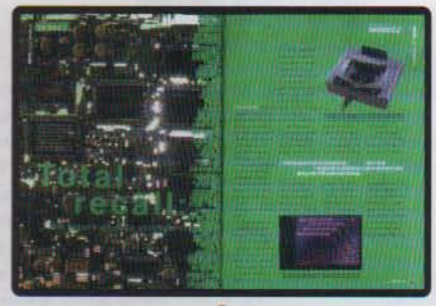
Z (PC; 8/10), *NiGHTS Into Dreams* (Saturn; 8/10), *Die Hard Trilogy* (PS; 7/10), *Decathlete* (Saturn; 8/10), *Time Commando* (PC; 6/10), *F1* (PS; 8/10)


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1. *Little Big Adventure 2* towers over the Prescreen section 2. Peter Gabriel entertains nuMedia followers with a bubble and a urinal 3. *Quake*'s novel advertising campaign 4. Criterion's photoshoot sends them back to the 1950s. Nobody's quite sure why... 5. The cover feature, a deeply involving look at the world of data storage 6. The Bitmap Brothers' *Z*

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Revolution's managing director, **Charles Cecil**, dumps his family for *Warcraft 2*





Warcraft 2: one of the originals, and – in Charles Cecil's opinion – still the best

It was 1997, and poor-quality 3D was all the rage on the PC. The RTS genre was in its infancy – and then *Warcraft 2* came along. For all us sad 'Lord Of The Rings' fans, the rich 2D graphics drew us into a wonderfully appealing fantasy world. While the story was a bit dodgy, the gameplay was excellent and the balance was just right. The graphic design of the units was fabulous and, crucially, they were drawn in such a way that their function was immediately obvious, as were their strengths and weaknesses. This made the game wholly intuitive. My wife and kids were abandoned as I sat, hunched over the PC, relegated to the spare room.

Warcraft 2 is still, for me, the best RTS. There have been dozens of others since, but they have all fallen into the sequel trap, namely that developers (and publishers) didn't really identify why the original games were so great and so built on the wrong elements at the expense of right ones. I look forward to *Warcraft 3* and hope that it really does build on the best elements of its prequel. Blizzard's admission that they have been redesigning the title explains the long delay, but suggests that the vision is wavering. Let's hope that they get it right.

FAQ

Takayoshi Sato

Manager/director/artist, CGI Works, KCEA

Takayoshi Sato is a manager, director, and artist at Konami America. Having moved to the US, he's been studying western phonetics in a bid to overcome lip-synching problems due to the differences in Japanese and American enunciation.

What was the first videogame you played?
Space Invaders, by Taito.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
A NES.

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
When I started in the industry, it was *Sexy Parodius*. But I remember I created a shooting game in BASIC.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
Since *Sexy Parodius* was a conversion, the only part that I designed was the option screen. After that I worked on *Silent Hill*. I'd say that the character design in that was my first industry job.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
It's the interesting, revolutionary game that I've been warming up in my head.

What was the last game you played, and what did you think of it?
It was *CounterStrike*. All of us at work connected and played together. Although I usually get killed first, it's really fun to have a tag match with people I know. Although I'm a creator of visuals, I forget that when I play a network game.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
I don't spend much time playing games since I stay late at work every night. Thus I suppose I spend about two, three hours a week.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
Mo-Cap Boxing and *Police 24/7*, both by Konami. They were really cool games. *Police 24/7* has a Japanese city (based on the Shinjuku area, in Tokyo) that's so realistic I really get shocked when I shoot a pedestrian by mistake. The feeling of being there is really good.

"I get disappointed with the fact that even though projects now require a lot of money, the system of game development is old"

What's your favourite book, album, and film of all time?
When I was in school, I read a lot of Japanese literature. Overseas literature tends to be difficult to read once it's been translated into Japanese. I'd like to read the original text, but that's not possible. As for music, I like 1970s sounds. Movies: I like Paul Verhoven's work, like 'Turkish Delight', 'Robocop', and 'Basic Instinct'.

Which Web site do you most regularly visit?
Sexy Web sites.

What game would you most liked to have worked on?
I suppose since I made *Silent Hill* from the start that I have the deepest affection for *Silent Hill*.

Of all the games you've been involved in the past, what's your favourite, and why?
It is *Silent Hill* as well (I have been involved with two titles only, *Sexy Parodius* and *Silent Hill*).

What stage is your current project at?
To a good extent it's finished.

Which aspect of it do you think will impress players the most?
We tell the story in a way that doesn't happen in other titles. In order to make the most of this, the background plot is perfectly incorporated as well. We're trying to impress game players much more than in the previous *Silent Hill*. Generally speaking, one aspect that will impress players the most is the showing of 'the world' created with visuals and sound in a very focused way

What videogame are you most looking forward to?
PS2 *Metal Gear Solid 2*.

What disappoints you about the industry?
I get disappointed with the fact that even though projects now require a lot of money, the system of game development is old. We make projects with a profitable future, not ones that depend on the developer's hard work. In the past we could just rely on the creators. However, now we must be able to predict profitability from the start to invest in a huge project.



What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
When I complete a project and grin while looking at my work over and over. Also, I enjoy it when I get praise from my acquaintances to whom I forcefully show my work.

Whose work do you most admire?
I can't say exactly, since I have only seen the inside of Konami. Usually the public only gets to see team leaders rather than the actual game developers. An example of getting to know some people would be Mr Hideo Kojima. I really admire his vitality: he does the work of an executive, a director, and a scenario writer at the same time.

What new gaming platform are you most looking forward to?
I have expectations for XBox, or, should I say, Microsoft. If Microsoft has the initiative, the platform will be the most stable. If the platform becomes stable and the human resources are fluid, the names of game writers will become stable too. With this, we could see an improvement in the quality of the product and the cultural value.

What are your thoughts on mobile phone gaming?
Mobile phone gaming is currently specialising too much. You can make profit that way, but I don't think it'll change many people's way of thinking. I'm sure that mobile phone gaming will be popular, but as a creator I'd like to discover and invent, rather than just go for profit. Also, speaking from a creator's point of view, I'd prefer to be using state-of-the-art material.

inbox

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edge@futurenet.co.uk

I'd like to comment on the technology that pushes the boundaries of what is possible to be represented in videogames, and how it affects the player. As technology moves forward, it becomes possible to depict the 'real' world more easily than before, but this brings a lot of problems.

I recently got a ZX Spectrum emulator for my PC, and, playing the games from the early '80s, I couldn't help but notice that, even though the graphics were crude, and the physics completely off (most of the time), the enjoyment was as great then as it is now. Thinking why it is so, I concluded that both the graphics, the stories, and all the game effects left a lot of room for the gamer to fill in with their own imagination. Just like reading a book, each player got to form the remainder of the game that the technology forced the game designer to leave unfinished. This is not the case any more. Being able to construct very detailed worlds in the games leaves almost nothing to the gamer to imagine. All that the gamer is left with is noticing the mistakes in the game, and that leaves little space for enjoyment.

Now it seems that game development is in a state of transition that even the film industry couldn't get out of: that of the inability of designers to use all the technology at their disposal. Mimicking 'reality' in games is just the minimum the technology enables – the real potential lies in making worlds with their own rules that are different from the one that we are living in, but in a manner that would be complete and that won't leave the gamer noticing the mistakes this new world shows. There is something to be learned from science fiction as a literary genre: even though the writers can't write about the things out of human experience, they wrap their stories in imagined and non-existent appearances, so they can tell us something about our own society and life. The same could easily be applied to game design, and most specifically to the stories games tell and the design of the game environments. I can't wait for that moment to arrive

Stajic Aleksandar, via email

What is it that you have against the PC? Any chance you get you moan about 'the excessive realism' or what you see as 'a lack of innovation' – even the mouse and keyboard are regularly put down. Maybe you've been trying to convince yourselves since *Doom* that PC gaming will never last.

Realism is not something you can knock. Simulation gaming is totally separate from the rest of the gaming industry. It's there for people for people who want to fly planes and command armies but never can in the real world, so the more realistic it is, the more immersive it is for them. You say it isn't 'fun', but try telling them they aren't enjoying themselves.

And on innovation, in the last five years the PC has made leaps and bounds in the aforementioned simulation gaming, and has created at least two new genres of gaming (RTS and FPS), not to mention what it has done to online gaming and roleplaying. Can you show me anything similar that consoles have done recently, on the same scale or otherwise?

As for the mouse-versus-joypad debate, that was concluded when everyone bought a mouse and keyboard for their Dreamcast.

There are certain things the PC can do better than any console: firstperson shooters (some people won't admit it, but *Half-Life* is superior to *Perfect Dark*), realtime strategy, simulations (from *Hidden & Dangerous* through *The Sims*, to god knows how many flight sims), and online gaming (with the likes of *CounterStrike* and *EverQuest*). Likewise, there are certain things that consoles can do but the PC can't: beat 'em ups, platformers, and games like *Jet Set Radio* (whatever genre that is). And there will never be a *Zelda* on PC.

I do own a couple of consoles, and I enjoy being able to sit down and play for ten or 20 minutes, but I get my true gaming fix by spending a much more immersive couple hours on my PC. The point is that the PC is not an oversized, arrogant console, and if it is rated as a console it will always come up worse. It's a completely separate entity and it's none the worse for it.

Brian Ashford, via email

Comparing PC gaming to console gaming is a pointless exercise. Realism is games is increasingly relevant, though. With the technology at their disposal right now, it's clear that devcos must make compromises when attempting to deliver representations of real-life scenarios/events. *Operation Flashpoint* (see p90) does this by simplifying gameplay elements such as vehicle control – it doesn't try to make its jeeps behave in a *Gran Turismo*-style manner; if it did so it would be simply over-egging the pudding. As it stands, it succeeds in walking the line between videogaming and real-life believability. But this is exactly where so many PC games fall down: by not being able to even identify that line. Naturally, flight sims must be as 'simmy' as possible by their very nature, but if 'sim' isn't in the game in question's category, then don't expect its oversights to be forgiven.

A while back I seem to remember **Edge** berating non-videogame magazines for reviewing games when they really had no clue about them. I would therefore like to ask **Edge** to refrain from the topic of real martial arts after 'The Making Of… *The Way Of The Exploding Fist*' (**E**97).

Mr Barnett's claim to have read 'every book in the district' must have amounted to the sum total of one, and a not very good one at that. So inaccurate was he in his description of Wing Chun and Bruce Lee's 'art' that it was a bit like me making a



Simon Wyndham damns **Edge**'s martial-arts knowledge, something apparently exposed during **E**97's *Exploding Fist* 'Making Of'



Ben Wharton, who put together onedotzero's Lens Flare showcase, believes that FMV sequences should be judged on their own

statement like: "*Daytona USA* was really developed to help people on their advanced driving courses."

Please give a BS alarm first next time. Good article, though. However, I would love to see one on *International Karate+*.

Simon Wyndham, via email

Edge bows its white-bandanna'd head in apology.

In issue 97 of **Edge** there were pictures of the XBox broadband adapter. It looks to me like it is just slightly smaller than the GameCube. Is it because Americans think bigger is always better? GameCube's broadband adapter fits snugly on the underside of the machine. And why do the XBox units feature LCD displays? I see no use for it, and it is just going to add to the cost. Bigger is not necessarily better.

Ken Wong, via email

You should've seen some of the mullets at E3. Like stately robes, they were. Shocking.

A lot of people have come down on Nintendo fairly hard for shipping development of GameCube *Metroid* to Retro Studios. But few people seem to know even the basic facts. To start with Retro Studios is a secondparty of Nintendo, ie not some bunch of cowboys hoping to make a quick buck. Equally importantly, *Metroid* was never great because of its gameplay.

The mechanics of jumping and shooting weren't very complex, especially compared to Nintendo's other platformers. It had cool graphics and a storyline which was well presented for its time. Only the gadgets and the bosses introduced the occasional thrill. It's not rocket science, and it's not *Mario* – which relied far more on fun level design than the relatively gimmicky *Metroid*.

So, Retro don't have the genius of Miyamoto, but the *Metroid* games never did. They were produced by a different division of Nintendo altogether (was it HAL or Intelligent Systems?), and if the old *Metroid* games never had his touch then why should the new one fail without it?

Toby Lieven, via email

No, the *Metroid* games had the touch of NCL genius Gumpei Yokoi. Anyway, if you didn't really care for the unadulterated brilliance of *Super Metroid*, why are you defending the production of the GameCube update? To suggest that its design values were anything less than videogame rocket science, you need some time with your GP.

When I first started to read Jason Scott's letter in **E**98, I was glad to see someone talking sensibly for once. I certainly agree with the fact that Sony have the upper hand against Nintendo and Microsoft in the race to win over the uninformed gameplaying public.

But then I read the little gem of a line: 'Huge gap left by the end of Sega machines'. Now I was confused. If there really were a huge gap in the market, then I don't think Sega would be shutting down hardware operations, they'd be trying to exploit it. The whole point is that the market just wasn't big enough for the Sega hardware.

I believe Microsoft should, and will, go for the throat. They won't be looking for a small niche. The amount of money they and their partners have poured into the XBox indicates they want domination, as with any company in their sector.

Returning to the topic of Sega, I'm glad to see them move to concentrate on software and fully expect them to create some truly inspirational titles. Let's just hope they release their games on multiple platforms rather than choosing just one. That way more people can enjoy the quality of the products they make.

Justin Klim, via email

That $500m will be going for the throat, all right, and just about any other bodily region available.

Regarding Sega's platform-target plans, the company is currently taking something of a scattershot approach, as *VF4* on PS2, *PSO ver.2* on GC, and *JSRF* on XBox attest. Despite its size, the company has limited resources. Expect these initial experiments to eventually give way to a more focused approach once a clear leader in the console space is determined.

Yes, the majority of games released are devoid of plot, emotion, and convincing dialogue [with reference to **E**97's Prescreen Intro]. However, so are the majority of films, and they have been an accepted artform for decades.

The games industry is still in its infancy technologically and still has a long way to go to fully explore its potential, but to say 'We need to accept a harsh truth... videogames have not yet risen above the level of prepubescent comic books' is selling our hobby – as it stands – extremely short.

I defy anyone to play *Planescape: Torment* and not run the gamut of emotions, be drawn utterly and immersively into the environs and story, and hold a heartfelt wish that it wasn't over when the end credits roll. That game alone negates any arguments to the contrary of 'games are art'. Unless your definition of art includes the need for acceptance by self-important, near-sighted critics.

Ian Wilson, via email

Planescape: Torment wasn't reviewed in **Edge**, but it's been played enough here for the team to be familiar with its sixth-form-style narrative.

As the programmer of Lens Flare, the onedotzero festival focus on animation in computer and videogames (featured in Frontend, **E**98), I'd like to reply to points made in your report.

As an animation compilation, Lens Flare has never attempted to give explicit value judgements on the work showcased, nor does it describe the relationship between the 'passive' animations and the interactive gaming experience which they precede or envelop. The reason is simple –

> 'The amount of money Microsoft and its partners have poured into the XBox indicates they want domination, as with any company in their sector'



Tom bemoans the fact that *GoldenEye* will always get mainstream recognition over *Perfect Dark*. Which is not to say he wants that to change…

onedotzero's compilations are not a venue for critical analysis. They are a celebration.

However, as was stated, such measurements of success, be it in technical, emotional or narrative terms, especially in the context of a gaming experience, are vital if this sector of the interactive industry is to ever achieve what I believe it has the potential to become – an artform in its own right. And that is why I have begun to write about these very things in *CGI* magazine, because, unlike **Edge**, I don't believe that developers should be left alone to find the answers.

We need debate, we need discussion, we need players being a whole lot more critical and demanding of every aspect of the software they choose to purchase. So many talented artists don't get the credit they deserve, while mediocre work often goes unchallenged or is (bizarrely) applauded. Many would say that it's the games and not the pretty pictures which are true test of a healthy industry, but when animation in its many forms holds the promise of not only broadening the appeal of videogames, but also developing the emotional hold and depth of a medium, ignoring it seems folly.

Ben Wharton, via email

Edge readily concedes that developers should not be left alone to find answers when it comes to FMV. But it is ready to admit that it is developers who have the ultimate responsibility to put those answers into practice. Whether or not ingame FMV can become an artform in its own right is a moot point, though, since it is debatable whether the dissociation of FMV from the interactive sequences that follow it is beneficial. Which is why **Edge** considers FMV within the context of monthly articles that pose questions about the technical, emotional, and narrative aspects of videogames as a whole.

What is your Utopia? Why is it constructed out of contradictions? Why do you promise yourselves that it will be reached once gaming has as much kudos as other arts – specifically music/movies – and yet then tell yourselves that nirvana will be reached once the endless spiritless masses of sequels is banished? Is that not in itself a contradiction?

Look at both these industries you would have ours be like and you will notice that they are flooded by over-hyped tripe, and products which are, in a sense, more manufactured than created. Do we want lame products, designed for those who rather not get involved in the complexities of this universe, or do we want ourselves to remain the main customers of the videogaming industry and have our every need seen to? Do we want the huge egos that are associated with the movie and music industries? No, how can we, as a fundamentally different industry, sustain such vanities?

We work in teams, we don't want to produce such products, we don't want to play such products! In the massmarket *GoldenEye* always triumphs over *Perfect Dark*; my 'casual gamer' friends prefer the reassuring and recognisable environment Bond offers to the much improved upon, but alien, *Dark*'s, just as a shallow game of *Tekken* is preferred over the deeper *Fighter's Destiny* despite a more intuitive control system.

Why do we want to drag this industry that all of **Edge**'s readers love kicking and screaming into the full public glare only to see it succumb to the demand for familiar environments? Both in the movie and music industries some of the very best products are driven underground, where insufficient capital fails to do the original vision justice. The last good movie I saw was 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon', and before that? I can't remember. I walk into a video shop, I have a hard time picking one that I like the look of, and as for music, I've practically given up on mainstream artists. Why ruin another good industry, eh?

Tom, via email

It's already halfway down the road, Tom.

'Why do we want to drag the industry we all love kicking and screaming into the full public glare only to see it succumb to the demand for familiar environments?'

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet

Topic: **Linearity in games**
Poster: **Toops**
I have to admit that I prefer linear games over the more open-ended games as I tend to get intimidated by the sheer number of possibilities. I therefore lose pace and the ability to concentrate on the plot proper, due to trying to check every single door, nook and blinkin' cranny. This process of checking everything in a world as big as *Shenmue* or *Final Fantasy* is very tiring on the brain and is not actually fun at all. Usually by the time I have gotten through the first street, I feel exhausted.

Topic: **XBox to be emu machine of choice!**
Poster: **Vertigo**
I'm interested to see how a) they can stop an Xbox from running tweaked PC emulators (they probably can't), and b) I'm extremely interested to see just what lengths they're going to go to to (eek, messy) stop Xbox being easily emulated on a PC. It may not just be a PC in a stable box, but the hardware seems pretty damn similar.

Topic: **M$ and the PM…**
Poster: **ShatnersBassoon**
Do you guys fancy setting up a new party? :-) I would invest the 3G licence money in a coherent broadband network for the UK so that all households would have fast and cheap Internet access. I would install GBAs in every bus and train in the country (renationalised public transport, of course). Rant, rant, rant, rant, rant…

Topic: **Laser Squad**
Poster: **Sabreman**
I'm getting too old for this stuff… or am I?

Next month



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